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A photograph of three men standing on a pebbly beach. The man in the foreground is wearing a red swim brief with 'SUN PROJECT' written vertically on the side, an orange swim cap, and black gloves. He is smiling and looking towards the right. Behind him, another man in a dark swim brief and orange swim cap is also smiling. A third man is partially visible on the far left. The background shows the ocean and a distant shoreline under a clear sky.

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Breaking the Rules

I was listening to Radio 4 the other day (I've reached that time in life) and was reminded about the story of William Webb Ellis. He was the man who picked up a football and ran with it. This man was a rule-breaker in all the right ways; there must have been some at the time who were seriously annoyed because he wasn't playing the game properly. If I'd have been there, I would most likely have been one of them. But through his maverick behaviour, his refusal to stick to the conventions of the time, a new and marvellous game was begun. Rugby.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not a rule-breaker for rule-breaking's sake. I'm not for stealing, maiming and generally damaging other people or their belongings, but I do think that sometimes it's good to push the boundaries, to step out of the comfort zone and see what lies on the other side of the fence. I'm one of those irritants who doesn't like to just accept it when I'm told something won't work or that that's not the way it's done. I like to understand why and challenge expectations.

It's why, eight years ago I decided to launch *Sorted*. People said it was stupid. They said I'd run out of stories, that there would be no market, that the digital age was making print a thing of the past. It was suggested that it was too big a job for me, that I wouldn't get enough support and that I'd be left bankrupt. I did it anyway.

Other men's magazines have gone into decline. People were right about that. *Loaded* and *Nuts* have closed and the internet is the first place people go for news. But *Sorted*? It's kept going. We are still finding stories, more stories than we can use, and our market has just kept growing. Now we're in shops all around the world, and we've even kept astride the digital revolution with our app that can be downloaded anywhere there is signal.

Some rules are made to be broken, or at the very least, pushed a little. Never let convention or critics hold you back from following the adventure of your life. Always look to see if you can do things differently, better or more effectively. Don't stop to worry about the naysayers.

After all, if it had been up to some people, William Webb Ellis would just have been sent off the pitch and rugby would never have been born. ■

Steve Legg

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Wild Camping in the Arctic Circle

How to have a holiday at -42°C

BY HAYLEY BARNARD



Flying high across the Canadian Arctic the land is infinite – white as far as the eye can see. I try to make out what the zig-zagging lines are a mile beneath me – cracks in the land? Ice roads? But there are no roads.

The only way in and out of the small communities peppering the landscape is by plane. What I'm looking at are ice flows.

It's early April. I'm cocooned inside a tiny passenger plane – where the hold and the cabin are one. The number of seats is determined by how much cargo the plane has to carry in the rear. On this occasion it's rammed with enough freeze dried food for our 12-day

expedition along with our bulky kit bags full of down clothing.

Some of our team are nervous flyers and, on this occasion, with good reason. For all of us it's our first time landing on frozen sea-ice within the walls of a fjord at night. Gratefully, we step onto the ice runway – the cold air hitting the back of our throat making us all cough and splutter like we're smoking cigarettes for the first time. After two days travelling we've made it to Qikitarjuaq on the north shore of Baffin Island within the Arctic Circle. Qik is known as the iceberg capital of the world and in the eerie silence of night it's as though we've landed on another planet. →





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This tracker automatically updated our location on an online map every hour so that our family and friends at home were able to monitor our progress. You can also message from the tracker or via a smart phone app.



**Solar Gorilla charger –
£145 inc VAT**

The Solar Monkey's bigger, badder brother, I used this to charge my equipment every day.



**Iridium GO. – £612 inc
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The GO. Works a bit like an internet router at home. Technically, I could send photos and emails back to HQ in the UK via this, although reliability was very hit and miss due to bad signal and terrible battery life in the cold.

We're offered a lift on a skidoo to the community's only hotel but I decide to walk. I'm giddy with the novelty of being able crunch my way through the snow straight from the steps of the plane to the front door of the Tulugak Hotel. No passport control. No immigration. No baggage collection.

"There's an iceberg outside the window!" shouts my roommate on seeing the view in daylight for the first time. The hotel is on the side of a fjord – not that one can tell at this time of year. The snow covers everything, making the land and pack ice-covered sea indistinguishable. Boats languish in snowdrifts, the only indicator of where the shoreline might be.

We're here to attempt a traverse of Baffin Island – Canada's largest island and the fifth largest island in the world. We will ski trek from north to south through the Akshayuk Pass, a traditional Inuit travel corridor, from Qik to Pangnirtung. Our food and accommodation (tents) will be dragged behind us on pulks (sledges to the layperson) harnessed around our waists. Having spent the preceding months dragging a tyre through the mud of the New Forest to simulate this, I'm hoping I'll be fit enough.

Polar bear threat?

Before entering the Pass, the local authority, *Parks Canada*, require everyone to undergo polar bear safety training. Most expeditions come with an element of risk. Had we been in the tropics or Australia we would be concerned with snakes or deadly spiders. As it is, we were concerned about becoming brunch for a 12ft high carnivorous mammal that can smell its prey from a kilometre away.

We weren't taking any chances. We had two types of bear fence designed as an early warning system erected around our camp. Each person carried a bear banger, shaped like a pen, but containing a single blank round that we were told would scare off an approaching bear. Should the bear get close, we also carried bear mace. I wasn't so keen on this intervention. I couldn't help thinking that if a bear is close enough to spray with mace then I would be in trouble. Lastly, a local Inuk that we called Andrew was to travel with us armed with a shotgun.

As is so often the case with the things we fear, a little knowledge is a bad thing. Over the course of our

**"THE BEARS ON BAFFIN
ISLAND WERE GENERALLY
"WELL BEHAVED". THEY HAD
NO INTEREST IN US WHEN
SEALS WERE APLENTY."**



journey, Andrew taught us not to fear these majestic creatures. Indigenous people have lived in Arctic regions for thousands of years, coexisting with polar bears. Andrew explained that the bears on Baffin Island were generally “well behaved”. They had no interest in us when seals were aplenty.

In both communities we visited, the polar bear continues to be hunted. It forms part of the Inuit subsistence lifestyle and long-held cultural traditions, although quotas now carefully regulate these hunts. Locals still eat polar bear meat and use the fur to make warm clothes. Polar bears are not at risk from this allowable harvesting. It is climate change that poses the greatest threat. Global warming means sea ice is melting earlier and forming later each year, leaving polar bears less time to hunt.

A number of mother polar bears and their cubs had been sighted in the fjord en route into the Pass the day before we were due to set off, so to avoid this high risk area we were transported via Komitq (traditional Inuit wooden sledges pulled behind skidoos) for five hours inland. Thankfully there is nothing a polar bear dislikes more than the sound of skidoo engines.

Wild camping in the Arctic

The Akshayuk Pass is a steep-sided valley with towering mountains on either side, snaking its way across the Island. We arrived at our first night camp just after the sun had gone down behind the nearby peak. It's cold – I'm colder than I've ever been in my life. The skidoos have gone and we're alone. I'm wearing every specialist bit of kit I own – Merino wool base layer, mid layer, fleece, down jacket and ski trousers, an Arctic parka →



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Hand warmers – a couple of quid each

If there's one thing that became ESSENTIAL to me as expedition photographer, it was these. I didn't ever manage to get my batteries above 15%, and the moment I took them out of my jacket and into the cold they would only last minutes before being dead again. I created a nifty system where I covered the camera in hand warmers, and this extended the battery life by just enough to get a few decent shots.



Polar Bear

FACTS AND MYTHS

FACT

Polar bear cubs weigh the same as an adult guinea pig.
 Polar bears are excellent swimmers.
 Their Latin name means 'Sea Bear'.
 Less than 2% of polar bear hunts are successful.
 Persistent polar bears have to work very hard for a meal.
 Their skin is black and their fur is translucent, not white.
 The polar bear is the largest land carnivore in the world.
 The polar bear was the mascot for the 1998 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Canada.

MYTHS

Polar bears cover their black noses to be better camouflaged when hunting seals.
 Polar bears are left pawed.
 A polar bear's hollow fur can conduct UV light
 Bi-Polar bears? NO. Polar bears do not live in Antarctica.
 Orca whales do not hunt polar bears.
 They do not use tools such as blocks of ice to kill their prey. Ridiculous.

with fur-lined hood, under which is a balaclava and wool hat, bearing the Canadian maple leaf symbol in solidarity. There's no time to hang about.

We set to work putting up our specialist tents, trying to work out which one of the three varieties of tent peg we should use – snow peg, ice peg or ice screw. It seems to take an age in the biting Arctic wind. The training we did in one of Tesco's industrial freezers didn't prepare us for this.

Our tents are too small to allow us to cook within them, so we use mess tents that are shaped like wigwams. This has the added benefit of keeping the food away from our beds should a curious polar bear wander in to camp looking for a quick snack. On many an occasion I would have gladly given my rehydrated slop to a passing bear if it meant I didn't have to eat it. But I was burning at least 5,000

calories a day, and taking on sufficient fuel and liquids is the most important factor in remaining warm.

Nothing is easy when living in a freezer.

There is a gruelling routine to wild camping in Arctic regions – a daily battle against





the freeze to produce enough water to drink was central to our existence. Even here the blue Ikea bag is invaluable, this time as a tool in the water-making process: chip away at ice; load into Ikea bag; carry to mess tent; pour ice chippings into large pan; put over gas stove; wait; wait; wait.

Skis and crampons

Moving is bliss, however heavy the pulk feels behind me. Moving equals warmth. Our first ski slides south take us up the Owl River Valley floor. We find it's easiest to move if we stay on the thick ice covering the Owl River itself. Below are a few metres of ice and, below that, life continues in the unfrozen water. Air bubbles lay trapped in the thick ice creating mesmerising patterns.



We use cross-country skis with skins on the base. The skin material allows the ski to slide forward smoothly but stops the ski sliding back, like running your hand the wrong way against the fur on a cat's back. We also use crampons, metal spikes that attach to the bottom of our *Sorel* boots, which help us climb the steeper sections of frozen rapids.

Through the lens of my ski goggles I can hardly take in the scale of the scenery before me. I've been to some amazing ski resorts in my time but it is the remoteness and wilderness of Baffin that makes it a unique destination. The valley I stand in was carved by a huge glacier many thousands of years ago. Today, as we penetrate the mountains, we pass glacier after glacier sadly retracting over the top of the high walls of the valley.

We cover between ten to 12km a day, heading slowly up towards Summit Lake as a full-blown Arctic gale tries to force us back. The wind chill is often more significant than the actual air temperature here, so although it's 'only' -26°C we've battled 80kmh winds for five days resulting in temperatures down to -42°C .

Reaching the end of Summit Lake feels like a significant victory as we move on to Glacier Lake for the end of day six. Here we are treated to a camp site like no other, with the famous Mount Asgard as a backdrop. The cylindrical tower and flat top calls to the best climbers in the world (YouTube search: 'Mount Asgard Baffin Island - Steve Backshall').

From here we descend. The sun came out, the wind disappeared and we laughed our way, slipping and sliding, down frozen waterfalls and rapids into the Weasel River Valley. That night we camped at the foot of the mighty Mount Thor, it's 1,500-metre rock face famed as the longest uninterrupted cliff in the world.

There is less snow underfoot the further south we go. I'm using different muscle groups now as I haul my pulk over boulders and rocks. We cross the Arctic Circle and pose for photos at the marker telling us that we are at $60^{\circ} 40'$ north and we know that the end of our journey is fast approaching.

The Arctic has got its claws in to me with its incredible vastness and isolation. A week or so in to our journey I realise that the complexities and stresses of normal life haven't even figured in my thinking. All I'm focused on is the breathtaking scenery combined with the practical - how much longer can I ski for before I need to take on more liquid or food? Is any of my skin exposed to the elements and at risk of frostbite? This is total escapism and it feels like such a privilege. The Arctic's staggering emptiness has filled me up. ■

Information

We travelled with *Black Feather*, the Wilderness Adventure Company. www.blackfeather.com

A winter Auyuittuq Ski Traverse in 2016 is CAN\$7,095

A summer Auyuittuq Hiking Traverse is CAN\$4,695

Prices per person, includes polar guides, equipment, food, hotels at both ends and internal Canadian flights.

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Tourist Information: www.nunavuttourism.com

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ACTION

BEAR GRYLLS

The Bear Facts



“EDMUND HILLARY, NEIL ARMSTRONG, YOU KNOW THE NAMES; MEN WHO EMBRACED THE ULTIMATE IN RISK AND FAILURE.”



Failure isn't Failure

I try never to use the word 'failure' because failure doesn't really exist apart from in our mind. I call it something else: 'an unsatisfactory outcome'. Or even better: 'a stepping stone to success'.

People are often quick to label others a 'failure'. There are many people who find it all too easy to point out loud and clear when others fall short of their dreams. But only little people belittle other people.

Look at whom President Theodore Roosevelt so smartly gave the real credit to in life, 'It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better.' The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly... who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.

Cowards criticise mainly because it makes them feel better about their own lack of courage to try anything daring themselves. So the best (though often the hardest) thing to do is to ignore their criticism. Or, even better, use it as fuel to your fire. We all face criticism and we all have to live with our 'failures', and other people's opinions of those 'failures', but try not to take them personally. Consider them as signposts that you are doing something right.

It means you are where you should be: in the arena, in the battle, and another stepping stone closer to success.

Edmund Hillary, Neil Armstrong, you know the names; men who embraced the ultimate in risk and failure. And if they hadn't faced the risk and failure, then both Everest and the moon would have very different stories to tell. You see, if it was all easy then everyone would succeed. **It is precisely the risk and the chances of failure that give us the opportunity for success.** And if you can fail more than anyone else you know, I just bet that you will finally succeed! Fail, fail, and fail again. Sound strange? Well, it is a key to succeeding.

Go out there, take calculated risks, work hard, be ready for the break, and be prepared to run when everyone else is slowing down.

Then success will come knocking. It is a law of the universe and a wonderful part of how the world works. ■

Bear Grylls is an adventurer, writer and television presenter. He is best known for his television series *Born Survivor*, known as *Man vs Wild* in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Bear spent three years in the SAS and is one of the youngest Britons to climb Mount Everest, doing so at the age of 23. In July 2009, he became the youngest ever Chief Scout at the age of 35.



'Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.'



If you want to read on, we strongly recommend investing in a copy. It's available from all good bookshops and online retailers, and it could just help you make the changes that you need to introduce in order to turn your life around.



Bushcraft

WITH ELLA DICKINSON

Ray Mears and Bear Grylls. Starting fires with flints and skinning deer. Sheltering from snowstorms and navigating waterfalls. Strenuous physical activity and a comprehensive knowledge of the natural world. To me, 'Bushcraft' has always equalled extreme situations where lives are at risk and starvation is imminent as one man battles the elements alone.

On a cool, sunny day in July, my understanding of Bushcraft as I knew it was put to the test. I went to a course hosted by Sunrise Bushcraft in the New Forest. Their Bushcraft camp is sheltered by the beautiful woodlands of the 300-year-old Somerley estate.

Sunrise Bushcraft was founded by James White in 2008 after he left a successful career as a property developer to pursue a lifelong passion in all things Bushcraft. James, as with our course leader for the day, Joe, are both enthusiastic cooks.

Bushcraft skills range from rope and twine-making to tracking, hunting and fishing. Sunrise Bushcraft utilises their forest camp to teach some of the finer skills including fire craft, foraging, the use of knives and axes, and shelter-building, with the aim of getting people to spend time in the natural world.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of Bushcraft is "skill in matters pertaining to life in the bush" and the word 'bush' has been used in its current sense in South Africa and Australia as far back as the 19th century. Evidently, people in the UK don't live in 'the bush'. We don't have to survive in the wilderness, spear-hunt for our next meal, or lack a box of matches to start a fire. But what is it about Bushcraft that has so captured people's imaginations?

"BUSHCRAFT SKILLS RANGE FROM ROPE AND TWINE-MAKING TO TRACKING, HUNTING AND FISHING."



What Wood to Carve

The wood you choose to carve with comes down to where you are and what object you hope to carve. Spoons are great to start with – they're useful, require a few different techniques, and are easy to handle.

The best advice for someone new to carving, especially when outdoors, is to use green wood. Green wood is fresh from the tree and hasn't dried out yet. It is a lot softer, easier to carve, and kinder to your knives. In the UK, look for any hard wood – birch is nice – and fruit wood not only carves well but looks good too. Avoid pines or anything with lots of sap. Straight-grained wood is easier to carve, but use crooks and natural forks to your advantage by incorporating them into your design.



Instant fishing hook

This tip comes straight from our ancestors here in the UK. Thorns from bushes such as hawthorn or even rose bushes make great fishing hooks. Cut off a few thorns and tie them to your line to do some survivalist fishing. For a more modern approach, if you are at a commonly fished riverside, check the reeds and bushes for broken lines and lures. Most folk, when presented with a caught line, will pull until the line snaps rather than bother to untangle it.



Here, I must admit that I was raised in a small town in the heart of rural Wiltshire. I spent whole afternoons as a child playing with my three siblings on the hills of the Calstone and Cherhill Downs. But for the last six years I have lived in central London and my 'outdoors' life has consisted of infrequent visits to the manicured rose garden in Regent's Park. I miss time outdoors, walking and taking in wildlife, marvelling at nature. I miss being away from the serenity of rural life and all the space and creativity that it brings.

Throughout my day practising Bushcraft in the New Forest, I realised that Bushcraft was really what my siblings and I had spent many hours of our childhood practising. Away from Disney cartoons, our Gameboys and rollerblades, we invented intricate games, crafted bows and arrows from tree branches and, best of all, talked face to face as we played, and so grew together as a family. This is also what struck me about our Sunrise Bushcraft day in the forest – it was a day to intentionally enjoy time outside without the trappings and solitude of modern society. In our comfort-bubbles we get so bored by stuff that our elemental enjoyment of natural world and authentic community is lost.

The people attending the course ranged from a stag do of young medics, some siblings on a weekend away, and a friend and I. We were a diverse bunch of pupils. Our first lesson of the day was to make a fire without matches, our second to understand the laws and uses of knives and axes, our third, foraging for food. The latter part of the day for me was the most fascinating as I learned about the secrets of the flora and fauna around us. We watched as Joe, our course leader, strip down a nettle stalk and twist it into rope, "Two of these ropes have enough tensile strength to lift a Land



Nettles and their uses

Nettles are a stingy bother, but don't dismiss them as a mere nuisance. They can be useful for lots of things.

They're used as an ingredient in soups, but can also be treated like any other spring greens. Steam them for about five minutes as a self-sufficient alternative to spinach. It is said that consuming nettles can help several ailments, from eczema to hay fever. Making nettle tea is simple. Take some tips of nettle and steep them in hot water. Be sure to whip those leaves out when the water starts to turn green.

"IT'S ABOUT THRIVING IN A WILD ENVIRONMENT AND ENJOYING ALL THE BENEFITS AND BEAUTIES THE NATURAL WORLD HAS TO OFFER."

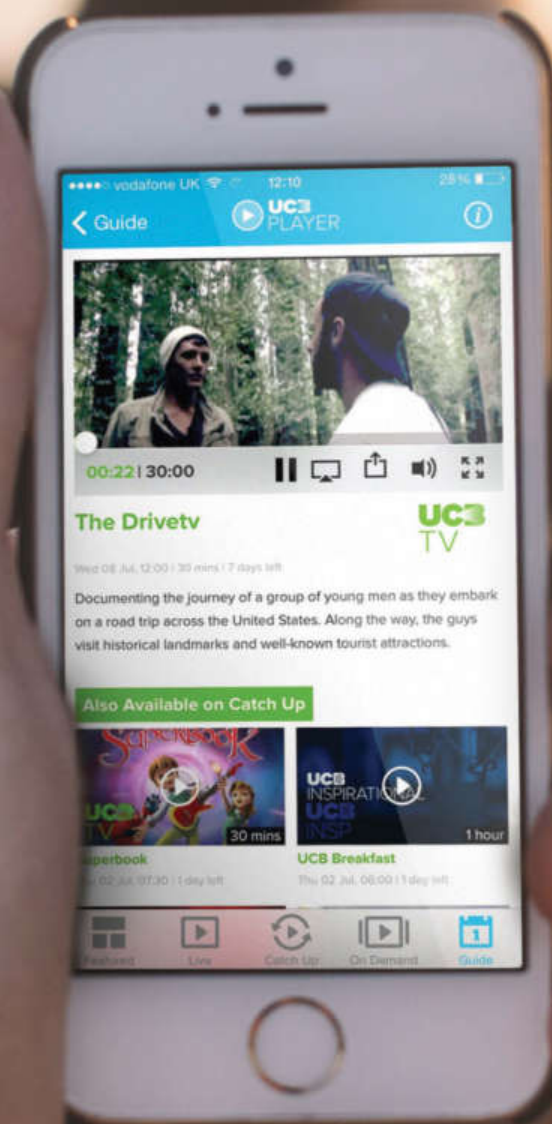
Rover." Who would have thought it? We learned about the medicinal properties of the plants around us. We were introduced to a tree which blossoms for only two weeks a year, but its blossom produces some of the finest and most expensive tea. I was taught that acorns contain a substance called tannin, which is toxic to the human digestive system, but when treated correctly, the nuts can be grated into cakes or used in cooking. With every twist and turn that we took, the woodland offered us another surprise.

I asked Joe what he loved about his job. "Getting to spend every day outside," was his answer. I learned that Bushcraft isn't all about fighting alligators, eating larvae for lunch, or drinking your own urine. Bushcraft is not necessarily about surviving. It's about thriving in a wild environment and enjoying all the benefits and beauties the natural world has to offer. A Bushcraft school, founded by Ray Mears in 1983, simply states, "Bushcraft is the art of the possible."

This could not be a more apt description for a set of skills or experiments which, when put to use, turn nettle stalks into ropes, discarded wood into cooking utensils, and treat the natural world as a place of excitement, creativity and potential. ■



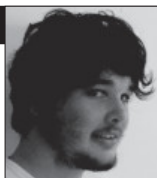
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ACTION

JIM LOCKEY

Bushcraft

Survival Gear You Need in Your Pack

“I NEVER WANTED TO WRITE THIS, I WANTED TO BE A LUMBERJACK.”

Have you ever noticed how *Monty Python* sketches are filled with strange little men trapped in their office jobs; men held

prisoner by the expectations of society; men frustrated by domesticity and tortured by the desire for freedom? I have, and I relate. These character traits would live on in the Pythons' later works. It was in John Cleese's most famous creation – Basil Fawlty, and in Sam Lowry – the daydreaming office drone of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*.

But it was only Palin's later career that took one of these trapped men and set him free; only it wasn't a character, it was Palin himself. Through his travelogue TV shows we saw a man escape all the twin

trappings of middle-class privilege and celebrity fame by donning a backpack and setting off to see the world. That has to be admired. His example reminds me that the desire to escape, even if only for a while, is probably common to all of us. And it can be satiated with just a little taste of adventure.

Of course, when I go off hiking I don't imagine I'm Michael Palin with a BBC accent and big white hat. I imagine I'm Bear Grylls. But foregoing the preened existence of metro-sexuality for the dirt and grit of the outdoors does not mean that we need to give up gadgets, does it? Well, in this new review section I'm going to find out. To start us off, here are two tiny gadgets for surviving in the woods... even if it is just for a weekend.

2 Bushcraft Essentials

EDCBox

Bushcraft Essentials products are usually a bit of a novelty and not truly useful. But their Bushbox range of pocket-sized stoves are different. They are unique little multi-fuel stoves that puzzle together from flat pieces, saving loads of room in your bag. The EDCBox is the smallest of the range but still able to boil water in a timely fashion using an Esbit fuel block. The stove is so small that you can slip it in a pocket or hang it from a karabiner. What is extra cool is that they are even used by UK Special Forces in the field.

Available from
bushcraft-essentials.com



Jim Lockey is an enthusiastic amateur when it comes to survival. He is an occasional YouTuber and the Youth Pastor at Harbour Church in Folkestone.

@jimlockey

1 Gerber GDC Zip Blade*

This little blade lives on the zip of my first aid kit. It looks like a normal zip pull but contains a useful little utility knife that is good with cordage; would probably come in handy around camp. Its tiny size means it won't match up to your multi-tool, but in an emergency (say for cutting clothes around a wound) it is invaluable. This knife should never be used except under those circumstances. But when going on a hike it is good to know that I have a simple blade there alongside my first aid kit.

Available from
gerber-store.co.uk

Thanks to the folks at Gerber you can get £5 off all products by using discount code SORTED5



*Please note that this knife has a locking blade. It should never be in your pack without good reason and should never be carried in a public place. Please make sure you are familiar with UK knife law and safe use before purchasing any knife.





The Secret of Financial Happiness

Do you know the secret to having everything you ever want? Do you know the secret of enjoying the very best in life? I do.



The secret to full financial security and happiness is revealed not in the *Financial Times* or the ads on TV, but it's in the Bible.

The apostle Paul wrote just after he received a windfall, "I have learned the secret" – but it wasn't the money itself that made the difference. He said, "Whether I have a little or a lot, I've learned the secret – of *being content*."

The word Paul uses for contentment is a very interesting one that he borrowed from a group of Greek philosophers of his day called the Stoics. This was their favourite word because their goal was contentment, and it was one similar to ours for 'sufficiency'.

The Stoics said contentment comes from eliminating desire and learning to be *self-sufficient*. Don't have any joy or any grief. Just be indifferent about life. Just say, "I don't care" about everything.

That's not what Paul's talking about. The Greeks liked to talk about secret knowledge, but Paul's secret is not self-sufficiency, he's talking about being grateful for God's sufficiency.

How do we find contentment? Look what Jesus said about it: In Luke 12:15: "*Don't always be wishing for what you don't have. For real life and real living are not related to how rich we are.*" (TLB) He's saying contentment is not found by consuming. You never get content by having more – have you discovered that yet?

Jesus goes on from there to tell us the number one enemy of contentment – comparison. When I start comparing myself to others, it takes away all my contentment. Jesus said it's like birds and the flowers. Are they worrying? No. Why? Birds don't say, "You got

more worms than me." Daisies don't say, "I wish I was a rose. Then I could be happy in life." Why?

Because they can't talk.

But if they could, they'd be content to be what God made them to be and enjoy life one day at a time.

Comparison robs contentment. You know how it goes – when you get a new job, you're chuffed, you thank God for it – until you find out that somebody else got the better perks, the bigger office.

You're thinking "What a great home God's given us." Then you visit your friends and their house is twice the size.

I'm going with Compassion to Haiti again next January with my wife Zoe. I'll visit a couple of the kids I sponsor there and see the church our church has helped rebuild after the earthquake. How would you feel if you went to Haiti and compared your home to theirs? I'll never forget hearing my friend J John ask, "Can we live more simply, so others can simply live?"

But we lose contentment when we compare what we have with somebody who has more; it takes the joy away.

Paul says he's learned contentment. Because it's not natural. It's not natural to me because I want more, bigger, newer, better, best; always comparing and never contented. This will be a learning process, all our lives. God wants to teach us, and God is a great teacher, by the way.

How's God going to teach me contentment? By giving me everything I want, when I want it? Is that going to teach me contentment? Some parents do that with their kids.

What do the kids end up like?

Like maybe corporal punishment isn't such a bad idea.

We don't learn contentment by getting more. We don't learn contentment with what he have, until we learn to be content with what we don't have. That's how God teaches contentment.

A philosopher called Epicurus said, "To whom little is not enough, nothing is enough." We live discontented, in a discontented age. We can always think of more things to do with more money: and if that's where you look for contentment it will be a carrot on a stick, always out of reach.

How did Paul learn contentment? He set his bar much lower than ours. There's a verse in the Bible where he says where he set his contentment level. 1 Timothy 6:8 says, "*if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.*" (NIV)

There's his contentment level. If you've got enough to eat and you've got something on your back as you're reading today, you can be content. It doesn't even talk about houses. Half of the world live on less than £1.50 a day; 795 million people in the world experience food insecurity – meaning they live without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of nutritious food. That's one in every nine people on the planet. And in certain places in the world like Sub-Saharan Africa, one person in four doesn't have access to proper nutrition.

Paul says food and clothing is *enough*; 3.1 million children don't have enough; they'll die of malnutrition this year. One in three children in the world are stunted because they haven't got *enough*. Sponsor a child today if you want to do without a little, to change a life a lot.

I have MORE than enough and if you can read this I bet you do too. If God blessed us with more than enough, let's be a lot more grateful, and learn to be content with less. ■

"IF YOU'VE GOT ENOUGH TO EAT AND YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING ON YOUR BACK AS YOU'RE READING TODAY, YOU CAN BE CONTENT."



Anthony's new book '*Work It Out*' has been written to help you and your friends find your way back to God.

Anthony Delaney leads the Ivy Network of churches in Manchester and NewThing Europe, looking for Jason Bourne for the kingdom of God who will plant churches around the globe. Connect at anthonydelaney.com Anthony is also an advocate for Compassion UK. To find out how you can do without a little and change a life a lot, visit compassionuk.org today

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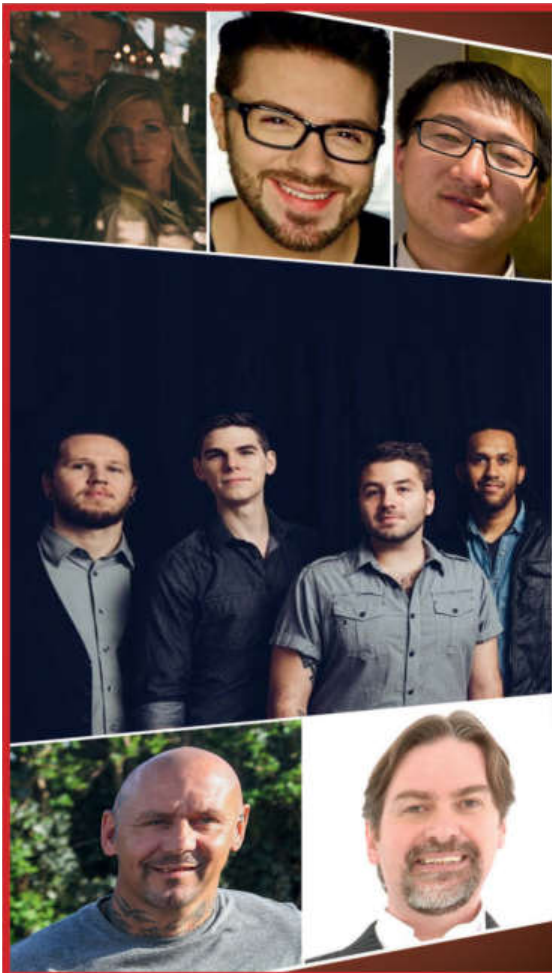
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COLUMNISTS

ALEX WILLMOTT

Your Will, Mott Mine

Don't Fear the Fear



I hate surprises. In fact, I'd go along to say that I probably have an undiagnosed phobia of them. It might stem from when my brothers would hide Doberman dogs in my bed before I returned home late at night. (We did own the dogs; they weren't stolen for a laugh or anything.) I remember pulling the bedsheets back to see two large canines staring at me. The shock always passed quickly when the dogs began to lick me like a melting Cornetto.

When someone has 'planned' something for me, I instantly think I'm being taken to the gallows. It's not good. My wife has had to swear an oath that she'll never surprise me in this life, or indeed the next. But the fear doesn't limit itself to just parties and pranks. I'm unable to be around almost anything spontaneous that could potentially cause me alarm or discomfort. I live by a strict code:

Wasps: A perfect excuse to run as fast as you can from any given situation.

Planes: An ideal time to focus intently on the fact that you're human, and shouldn't be airborne.

Dentists: For the best results, ask for every detail of the procedure upfront.

When the fear comes, it triggers the sensation of being charged at from all angles by an angry gaggle of geese on anabolic steroids. And not



"WASPS: A PERFECT EXCUSE TO RUN AS FAST AS YOU CAN FROM ANY GIVEN SITUATION."

just normal geese. No, these geese have been in the boozier for a week.

Weirdly, I always used to fear this fear itself, and the potential it has to render me useless in a serious situation. This was until earlier this month.

The Spanish spa hotel was renowned for its excellence. Sadly, the thermostat in their 'cold' shower room was about as useful as a chocolate fireguard. After three seconds inside the room, the wife and I noticed the water was exactly the same temperature as the water loved by us British tea-drinkers: scalding. The missus managed to find a slab of wall that just about protected her from the powerful

stream of boiling water. I wasn't so lucky. I had two choices: 1) Stand there and burn for five minutes. 2) Run through the power hoses and out of the room to switch the jets off and generally lose the plot.

I pondered both choices, and didn't like either of them. I glanced down to my chest and saw my skin begin to blister. "Enough of this," I said (or words to that effect), and bolted through the jets and through the door. The machine was switched off and I received first aid.

As we await appropriate compensation back home, it has dawned on me that the experience did have a positive side. I now know that despite my unhinged fear of the unknown, I can make good decisions when it all hits the fan. I'm sad I had to run through boiling water to learn this satisfying lesson, but I can say I no longer fear the 'fear'. Yeah, I'll still run out of a business meeting to flee a wasp, but I'll be thinking clearly when I do it. ■

Catch me on Twitter and let me know the fear stories you have.

Alex Willmott penned the epic *Selah* trilogy. Former newspaper journalist, sports fanatic and local football manager, Alex took a vow to live life to the full after reading the book of John in the Bible aged 16. Visit alexwillmott.com for more information.

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MOVIES

With Martin Leggatt

Spectre



Bond is back. Scream it, shout it, but most important of all, go and see it. In what has widely been reported as Daniel Craig's final outing as everyone's favourite Double 'o' agent, returning director Sam Mendes looks set to achieve the impossible and surpass the excellent *Skyfall*. *Skyfall* was quite possibly the best Bond film to date, and for me certainly harkened back to the early Connery films in terms of grittiness and realism. It refreshingly developed Bond in a kind of rebirth from *Casino Royale* to where we are now (I'll mention the very mediocre *Quantum of Solace* very sparingly as it nearly killed Bond surer than any assassin's bullet could). Mendes' Bond films are consciously aware of their heritage, but without resorting to self-parody or the clumsy in-jokes that proliferated in the Brosnan years. With a central theme of looking back to look forward, Mendes utilises Bond motifs and iconography,

admittedly predominantly from the Connery years, to make a punchier Bond. These started in *Skyfall* with Q telling Bond, "What do you expect, an exploding pen?" heralding an end to the gadgets that had blighted the Roger Moore films. The Spectre octopus ring, the classic Connery white dinner jacket and the Roger Moore black roll-neck and shoulder holster all hark back to the Bond tradition. Now as the film consciously looks back on its genre, Bond the character has to look back on a past that has only been revealed to us in fragments and hints. Bond is now in the unique position of being the most experienced and wisest character of all those around him, and instead of reacting to the plot and the schemes of his foe, he drives the action.

Just as *Skyfall* gave us the return of a male M (an incredible coup in casting Ralph Fiennes to succeed the irreplaceable Judi Dench), but

also a credible, more modern Moneypenny, *Spectre* has resurrected Bond's most fearsome and deadly enemy – the titular Spectre. The shadowy and seemingly indestructible Mr White is a returning character and through the casting of Jesper Christensen, we have a credible villain who wouldn't be better placed in a pantomime. And then we have perhaps the most exciting, and for me, eagerly awaited, casting of Christoph Waltz as the villain Franz Oberhauser, the author of all Bond's pain and everything that has happened to Bond in *Casino Royale* and *Quantum*.

Andrew Scott (*Sherlock's Moriarty*) joins the cast, while Léa Seydoux and Monica Bellucci provide us with modern Bond girls who are far more than eye candy. Rory Kinnear returns as Tanner alongside Ben Whishaw as Q and, of course, Fiennes as the new M.



Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans

Growing up in the 70s, I had a few heroes. Some have stood the test of time while others, such as the comedy actor Sid James, seem a poorer choice. Two that have stayed the course for me are James Bond, mostly Sean Connery, and Steve McQueen. I think that for most young men of my generation, and the one before, for that matter, McQueen was the prototype alpha male. In fact, I can remember my dad's sadness watching *Junior Bonner* and ruefully shaking his head, saying how ill McQueen looked. When McQueen passed away from cancer at a young 50 (that's only four years away for me

and seems incredibly young), my father cried – and I've only ever seen him cry a few times.

I think a lot of us identify with the stoic, loner, anti-heroes that McQueen seemed to specialise in and were probably an extension of the man's own persona. Of the many great films that 'The King of Cool' made, one of my favourites was the racing car drama *Le Mans*. It had me instantly hooked from the moment that it came on, with McQueen as racing driver Michael Delaney in his Porsche Carrera parked on the bends before the Mulsanne Straight and a powerful flashback to an accident the year before. *Le Mans*, which was terribly

underrated and poorly received on its initial release, has grown to be appreciated as a classic McQueen film and now features in this excellent documentary film by directors Gabriel Clarke and John McKenna.

Footage of the original film are spliced with never seen before footage (quite often a cliché, but in this case quite true) that didn't make the final cut, behind the scenes material and interviews with Steve's son, Chad, his first wife, Neile Adams, and members of the production team that assisted on Steve's ambitious project to make the best-ever motor racing film. I think he succeeded.

The 33

Do you remember back in 2010 when the news brought us minute-by-minute coverage of a group of Chilean miners who were marooned miles underground, and their dramatic rescue? Well, this Patricia Riggen-directed epic starring Antonio Banderas as Mario 'Super Mario' Sepúlveda, the leader of the trapped miners, with Martin Sheen, Lou Diamond Phillips, Cote de Pablo, James Brolin and Juliette Binoche, recreates the incredible bravery of those virtually entombed within the earth when a rock larger than the Empire State Building collapses within the mine, and the amazing heroic efforts of their rescuers.





Creed

The *Rocky* franchise gets a reboot with this tale of Apollo Creed's son Adonis (Michael B. Jordan), and his bid to step out of his dead father's shadow and into his legacy. Adonis'

life is far removed from the riches and splendour that his father enjoyed before dying in the boxing ring, and has more in common with the man who he chooses to be his

mentor, Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone). This clever story draws on much of the original *Rocky* story without becoming overly sentimental or schmaltzy.



Point Break

I write this still reeling from the shock that original *Point Break* star Keanu Reeves has just celebrated his 50th birthday. I've never considered Mr Reeves an outstanding actor, but have always immensely enjoyed pretty much all his films, with the original

incarnation of this film a classic. *Point Break* gets the reboot/remake/re-imagination treatment with a cast including Luke Bracey as Johnny Utah chasing down rogue extreme sportsman and criminal Bodhi (Édgar Ramírez). There is some stunning action

footage of snowboarding, skydiving and wingsuiting, but not even this or the presence of Ray Winstone in the Gary Busey mentor role can really make me pick this over the original. Plus the original had Patrick Swayze in it, how can you ever top that?

Martin Leggatt is married to Sue and father to Aaron, Sam, Hope and Paige. He's a self-confessed movie geek, although his tastes run to an eclectic assortment of action, thriller, black and white, war and pretentious (as Sue would say) art house films. Martin's favourite film is Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death*.

 @martylegg



CULTURE

TELEVISION

With Emily Russell

Pointless



Brian J. Ritchie/Endemol UK/REX Shutterstock

he aim of most gameshows is for contestants to score points with the person scoring the most at the end winning, but on *Pointless* the reverse is true. Instead, each two-contestant team is tasked with achieving the lowest number of points possible. They do this by deciding how 100 people answered often-obscure questions, trying to come up with correct answers that the least amount of people also chose as their answer. It flips the usual gameshow format on its head and is equipped with two terrific frontmen – comedian and actor Alexander Armstrong and, introduced as Armstrong's 'Pointless friend', Richard Osman, the man with all the facts and figures and usually quite a few funny one-liners as well.

Part of the fun of the show is the banter between Armstrong and Osman. While Armstrong was well known to television audiences before he became the *Pointless* host, Osman was not. He does, however, have a great deal of gameshow knowledge and experience. Osman previously worked as an executive producer on successful and popular television gameshows such as *Deal or No Deal*, *8 Out of 10 Cats* and

“PART OF THE FUN OF THE SHOW IS THE BANTER BETWEEN ARMSTRONG AND OSMAN.”

Total Wipeout. In fact he was the one who pitched the idea of *Pointless* to TV bosses; they liked his demonstration of the co-host role so much that they offered him the job. His first on-camera role has proven to be a great success, thanks to his easy chemistry with Armstrong (they were contemporaries at university) and his smart quick-witted attitude.

Part of *Pointless*' success is also due to how fiendishly hard it is – like a pub quiz; you never know what you'll be asked, and you have to work out what answers weren't popular. And once contestants get to the final round, they have to achieve a pointless answer in order to win the jackpot, a rare achievement as a pointless answer is a correct one that none of the people polled chose as their answer. If contestants who reach the final round fail to provide a pointless answer, then the jackpot money rolls over to the next day, raising the stakes for the next batch of contestants. Success is down to the luck of the draw and the breadth and depth of the contestants' knowledge. It's a show that often

reveals the usefulness of oddball knowledge and that no one knows everything, though Richard Osman regularly demonstrates that he certainly knows more than most. The fun for the audience is when they know something the contestants don't or when they achieve a pointless answer themselves; always satisfying.

Pointless has even spawned a celebrity version, gleefully titled *Pointless Celebrities*, in which famous faces team up to try to win a jackpot for a charity of their choice. It's a show that's become an afternoon favourite, thanks to its difficulty, its fun light-heartedness, never taking itself seriously, and its hosts who aren't afraid to tease the contestants as well as each other. ■

Emily Russell has a degree in Media and Film Studies and works as an administrator for the NHS. She wrote Culturewatch articles for the Damaris Trust website for eight years and watches far too much science fiction and fantasy, crime shows, and wrestling. She is married to Anthony.

 @funkyinfishnet



Pointless airs regularly on BBC One and also on Challenge. Two *Pointless* books and two *Pointless* boardgames are available for purchase now.



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DVD & BLU RAY

With Martin Leggatt

Spy vs Spy

Bond is back this month with the eagerly awaited *Spectre* and as Carly Simon sang in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, “Nobody does it better”. In acknowledgement of this claim, we look at some of Bond’s competition over the past 53 years.



Harry Palmer

Three years after Sean Connery burst onto the screen in *Dr No* in 1962, Michael Caine brought us a working-class antithesis to Bond with his screen incarnation of Harry Palmer, based on Len Deighton’s anonymous agent. *The Ipcress File* is set exclusively in a grey and gloomy London, with reluctant cockney spy Palmer more interested in gourmet cuisine, classical music and “birds” rather than espionage. The bespectacled Palmer is wilfully insubordinate with little respect for his superiors and has possible criminal tendencies, but despite this (or perhaps because of this), he is

still the best agent that his boss, Colonel Ross (Guy Doleman) has. The intricate plot sees Palmer transferred to Major Dalby’s (Nigel Green) department to investigate the disappearances of Britain’s top scientists. Once on the trail, he must discover which of his bosses is the traitor, but who can Palmer trust?

The first two films, *The Ipcress File* and *Funeral in Berlin* are both excellent, but the third instalment, *Billion Dollar Brain* is disappointingly mediocre, while the two late attempts to resurrect Palmer in the mid-90s are eminently forgettable.

Jason Bourne

When Matt Damon burst onto our screens as amnesiac super spy Jason Bourne in 2002 *The Bourne Identity*, it proved a game changer not just for the genre but for Bond in particular. Arguably, without Bourne, Daniel Craig’s explosive 2006 debut in *Casino Royale* may have been an altogether tamer debut, and may well have been a decider in his being cast as Bond. Could you imagine Pierce Brosnan, as good as he was, leaping from a crane before an action-packed roof-top free running pursuit?

Bourne is a super assassin, part of a shadowy CIA operation



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codenamed Treadstone. The trouble is that Bourne, fished out of the sea by a trawler crew, has no idea who he is. As he battles to recover his memory and identity, he slowly realises that he has an incredible amount of skills that no ordinary person possesses, until the final realisation that he is a government agent. He is pursued across Europe by fellow Treadstone agents as his employers seek to eliminate him as a rogue. A great cast support in the first outing including Franka Potente, Clive Owen, Chris Cooper and Brian Cox. Damon reprised his role in two excellent sequels, *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *The Bourne Supremacy*, both of which retained the multiple European locations and fast-paced action.

As an interesting geek fact, Bourne first hit the screens in 1988 played by a more cerebral and less muscular Richard Chamberlain in an incarnation much closer to the book. Co-starring Jaclyn Smith, Anthony Quayle and Denholm Elliott, it is well worth tracking down if you have the chance.

Joseph Reardon

Paul Newman starred as Joseph Rearden, a British agent in *The MacKintosh Man*, a John Denholm directed adaptation of Desmond Bagley's novel *The Freedom Trap*. In London, Rearden meets a man known as MacKintosh (Harry Andrews) who gives him details of how to steal a consignment of diamonds, which Rearden does, making a clean getaway. However, he is inexplicably caught by the police and subsequently imprisoned, despite there being no trace of the diamonds. In prison, Rearden tries to make contact with a man called Slade (Ian Bannen) who has been revealed to be a Soviet double agent, but with no success. Later, Rearden is busted out of the prison along with Slade by an organisation that demands a

share of his diamonds in return. It then becomes apparent that Rearden's mission is to uncover this organisation and trace them back to Slade's Soviet spymasters. The action scenes, predominantly in London, a great chase sequence in County Galway, Ireland and the climactic scenes in Malta make this far removed from the exotic locations of the cosmopolitan Bond adventure. There are great supporting performances from Andrews, Bannen, James Mason and Michael Hordern.

"IN MODERN ESPIONAGE, THOSE SHADOWY DEFENDERS OF OUR FREEDOM ARE QUITE OFTEN AS IN THE DARK AS THE REST OF US."

Maya

Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar-winning *Zero Dark Thirty* shows the modern reality of the CIA's obsessive ten-year hunt for Osama bin Laden, a hunt that has the fanaticism of Captain Ahab chasing down Moby Dick. Jessica Chastain became an overnight star with her fantastic performance as Maya, a rookie CIA agent at the time of the 9/11 attacks. Maya's first duties are to interrogate al-Qaeda suspects and terrorists, and initially she reluctantly engages in the extreme techniques used before becoming a firm advocate of the methods and the results obtained. As well as launching the career of Chastain, the film also benefited from some great performances by Mark Strong, Jennifer Ehle, Chris Pratt and the late James Gandolfini.

Zero Dark Thirty is a departure from most traditional espionage films, with its themes of torture,

military base bombings and the rise of a virtual terrorist state in al-Qaeda, and revealed the cold realities of modern spy craft at its dirtiest. The film revealed that in modern espionage, those shadowy defenders of our freedom are quite often as in the dark as the rest of us.

Jack Ryan

Jack Ryan is Tom Clancy's reluctant CIA analyst-turned-spy in a series of novels and, like Bond, has had different screen incarnations, from Alec Baldwin to Harrison Ford and an ill-fated outing by Ben Affleck. For many, myself included, the best screen incarnation was the original with Alec Baldwin in John McTiernan's *The Hunt for Red October*, Ryan is a talented intelligence analyst who discovers that a state-of-the-art Soviet nuclear missile submarine has set sail and gone missing somewhere in the North Atlantic. The Russians are pursuing him and enlist the Americans' help in sinking him as a rogue intent on an attack on the US, but Ryan is unconvinced. The reluctant agent, who believes the captain (Sean Connery) and a large percentage of his crew are set to defect, is sent out to help, with the American fleet chasing the *Red October* down. The chase is made even more difficult because the *Red October* can run silently, making it virtually impossible to locate by sonar detection. There are many great twists and turns to make the plot compelling, and Baldwin does a fine job of impersonating Sean Connery.

An epic supporting cast of superstars including Scott Glen, Sam Neill, James Earl Jones and Stellan Skarsgård, to name a few, help make this Ryan's finest hour.

Verdict: Many have tried and few have come close.



The Ipcress File



The Bourne Identity



The MacKintosh Man



Zero Dark Thirty



The Hunt for Red October

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BOOKS

With Mark Anderson

Muscles and Linguine

Look Who's Back

Timur Vermes

World War Two is taboo in Germany circa 2015. No real history tours, the spot where Hitler took his life is in an unmarked car park, it's a country that looks forward not back. Who could blame them? (Wrong word choice)

Enter *Look Who's Back*, this book has taken Germany by storm. Over a million sold and counting, I had to take a look why. Well, the plot is intriguing enough. Hitler wakes up in a field in the 2010s, (I know, random), the public thinks that he is an actor, however the world's most evil man wants to get his country back to the power it once was, with the help of YouTube and social media. It sounds far-fetched and to all intents and purposes, it is; however, like a street performer, this book has attracted the crowds and I was hooked.

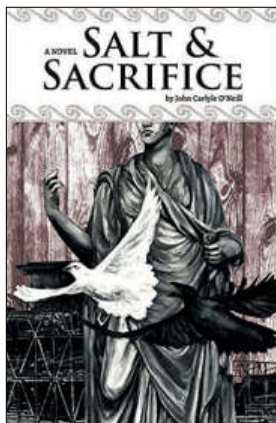
As a society we still have a generation with living memory of World War Two. Dark, humorous books like this also give a sense of how terrible Europe was in the 40s and how quick we forget.

The only negative about this book is the fact that it is translated from German to English. I am being honest; I don't get all the German cultural references to contemporary comedy or news presenters but I got over that quickly and enjoyed *Look Who's Back* for what it is.

Total Recall

Arnold Schwarzenegger

As a 20-something male, my early life was shaped by the ideal that a hero was not a hero unless he could dodge bullets, be ripped and could take anyone out at a moment's notice. So I jumped at the chance to review Arnold Schwarzenegger's book "Total Recall". It's more candid than you would think and Arnie is finished with politics so he has no need to worry about the repercussions from his revelations.



Salt and Sacrifice

John Carlyle

★★★★☆

A well thought-out plot. Fact woven into fiction.

I love history, especially anything to do with the early Christian period in Europe. I even went as far as studying archaeology at Queen's University. How I ended up in the pharmaceutical

industry is anyone's guess. *Salt and Sacrifice* is a story about the trade of Christians being persecuted in ancient Rome. It's full of drama, tension and corruption.

Ghurkha: Better to Die than Live a Coward

Kailash Limbu

You want excitement? I can guarantee you will not put this book down. Colour Sergeant Kailash Limbu was deployed in Helmand province and told to be ready for a standard 48 hours in the town of Now Zad. His platoon ended up under siege for 31 days. Low on ammo, high in body count, this account will get into your nightmares and shake you to the core.

From Venice to Istanbul

Rick Stein

Currently, I am sitting waiting on the wife getting ready to go out for dinner to celebrate our wedding anniversary, and I am flicking through Rick Stein's new book. I fell in love with Italy and its food and Rick hits his Venice choices on the head with his choice of meals. I'll have garlic shrimps and polenta.

Super pictures, amazing locations on the Med – what more could you need to complete an amazing cook book?

Mark was born in Belfast and developed a book and football obsession at a young age. He and wife Lisa belong to Fishgate, a church plant in Newtownabbey. Read Mark's musings at overtakenheart.blogspot.co.uk.

@Marky_MarkA



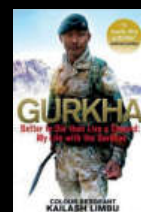
Great story, good twists and something different.

★★★★☆



Ego, humour and wonderful stories.

★★★★☆



Un-put-down-able.

★★★★☆



Feeling adventurous? Try a Rick special. (If my wife doesn't hurry up I might have to.)

★★★★☆



MUSIC

With Sue Rinaldi

Rend Me Your Ears



As Family We Go

Rend Collective
Universal Musical Group

Northern Ireland-based folk-rock worship band Rend Collective burst onto the scene in 2010 with *Organic Family Hymnal*. Fielding a winning combination of toe-tapping melodies, impassioned lyrics and a rootsy Celtic sound, the collective quickly won hearts. Three albums later, having accumulated enormous international acclaim and

attention, they emerge somewhat changed in *As Family We Go*.

Songs like "Celebrate", "You Will Never Run" and "Joy of the Lord" carry their familiar DNA – charming, buoyant and unyielding. However, "One and Only" and "Never Walk Alone" are less rugged and raw and introduce a more synth-led, polished environment, whereas "Your Royal Blood", a creative adaptation of "Nothing but the Blood", favours a bluesy sound design and displays soulful vocals from Chris

Llewellyn. "Just a Glimpse" may emerge a strong favourite and the infectious freedom and lyrical appeal of "The Artist" will harvest repeated plays.

As *Family We Go* is an extremely inviting listen and skilfully produced – but it clearly points to a subtle and, no doubt, intentional evolution of sound. Bands must be given space to develop and progress, but whether less Irish influence and more synth and guitar shine is ultimately a winning formula, remains to be seen.



Burning Bridges

Bon Jovi
Mercury

The storyboard behind Bon Jovi's 13th studio album is acquiring more publicity than the music itself. As well as being their first-ever release without long-time guitarist Richie Sambora, the stadium-filling band have also parted company with Mercury Records and *Burning Bridges* is the final offspring from that 32-year relationship.

Jon Bon Jovi describes it as a "fan album", otherwise known as a contractual obligation – equivalent to a final tidying of the house.

Only two songs are brand new, for example lead single "We Don't Run", a drum and bass powerhouse boasting an explosive guitar solo. Other highlights are sparse, but "Life Is Beautiful" and "Saturday Night Gave Me Sunday Morning" stand out and the title track is a resounding farewell to Mercury. Slightly disappointing release, although steadfast fans are bound to buy it, but I'm eager to see where the new journey will take them as there's no going back.



As Family We Go

Rend Collective



Burning Bridges

Bon Jovi



Pieces of Mind

North



Ransomed Soul

Dan Lank



Ransomed Soul

Dan Lank
DistroKid.com

There are so many independent projects out there and *Ransomed Soul* a seven-track EP from Dan Lank, is a worthy example. With solid production and likeable songs, the poetic feel of "Though I Walk" merges well with the more rock-driven "This Is Our God" and "God Who Rescues", and "How Sweet the Name" provides a noble and anthemic finish.

Pieces of Mind

North

Based out of New Delhi, the song-writing, performance and creativity of this five-piece experimental indie band is outstanding. Every track on *Pieces of Mind* is extremely enjoyable, with the occasional arrangement fusing their distinctive acoustic-folk/rock sound with Indian patterns. Highlights include "Change", "White Flag" and "Kaleidoscope", and lead singer Jordan Johnson shines.

Sue Rinaldi travels internationally as a concert artist, worship coordinator, speaker and creative consultant. A self-confessed info junkie and movie enthusiast, her interest in culture, justice, technology and the future fuels her living and writing. Visit suerinaldi.net.

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Come and join with us as we worship God



LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Cars

Faster and Faster

Motoring journalist Tim Barnes-Clay drives the latest BMW 3 Series, before the less-than-discreet Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS grabs his attention...

BMW 3 Series

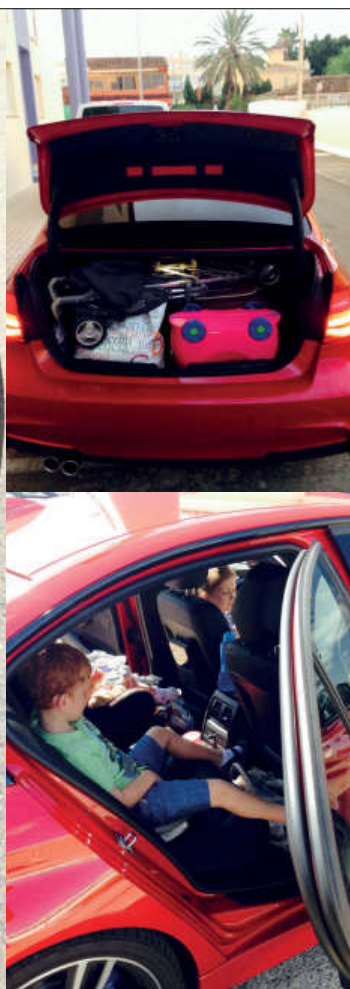
There is a lot of media attention around the 2015 BMW 3 Series at the moment. That's because the range has been given an update, consisting of sexier lights, fresh bumpers, new engines and a vaguely tweaked cabin.

Out of the 3 Series line-up, the £33,635 320d M Sport automatic is especially important. This is because, traditionally, it's the sports saloon of choice in the UK.

Its 2.0 turbo diesel engine produces 187bhp and gives the car a significant turn of speed. And when you counterbalance its 0-62mph

sprint of 7.2 seconds and 146mph top speed with an official combined average of 67.3mpg, it's hard to find anything to complain about.

I decided to test this very car by driving to the UK from Spain. I was already holidaying with my family down on the Costa Blanca, so I figured instead of flying back to →



PROS 'N' CONS

- Appearance ✓
- Power ✓
- Efficiency ✓
- Driving enjoyment ✓
- Rear middle seat ✗

FAST FACTS

Max speed:

146mph

0-62mph:

7.2 secs

Combined mpg:

67.3

Engine layout:

1995cc, four cylinder, turbodiesel

Max power (bhp):

187

Max torque (lb ft):

295

CO2:

116g/km

Price:

£33,635

Britain, why not bring my wife and three young children home courtesy of BMW?

But first, I had to fly up to BMW's media launch event near Bilbao, and then drive the 320d solo back to Denia, north of Alicante, to finish building sandcastles with the kids. That was 400 miles; so, with the 1,300 miles back home, I was looking at a total of 1,700 miles behind the wheel of the BMW 320d M Sport.

Having not stopped for fuel on my six-hour charge from northern Spain, my five-year-old son was first out of the door on my arrival at our

rented holiday home. He enthusiastically told me how much he loved the look of "our" new car. I couldn't help but agree. That's because, whether you're five or 65, BMW's M Sport package draws the eye. The dropped sport suspension, dynamic front and rear bumpers, and large 19-inch alloy wheels are befittingly aggressive, while inside there are leather seats, as well as climate control and those all-important 'M' symbols.

The next day, we crammed our luggage, including a buggy, into the BMW's boot and quickly

appreciated the four-door saloon's ability to 'live on the motorway'. On top of that, the flexibility of the ride, the excellent Sat Nav and the seats (apart from the middle bench area – but more about that in a second) amounted to long-haul paradise – for me and our three kids, anyway.

The only gripe during our 1,300 mile journey was about the aforementioned rear centre seat. My wife found it too firm and got a bit bruised from a seatbelt stalk that kept digging into her thigh. The only reason she was sat there is because our two-year-old settled far better with Mummy next to her. The other two took it in turns to either sit in the back or ride up front with me.

As implied earlier, the 320d M Sport is more than capable of pounding flat out across Europe hour after hour. The BMW will gobble up unoccupied stretches of bitumen at 140mph, no shakes. This halves the official fuel consumption figure, but when it's 2pm on a Sunday on the Continent and the school term starts at 9am on Monday in Britain, it's incredible how little you care about the car doing sub-40mpg.

With the Eurotunnel taking only 35 minutes, I had to rapidly remember that back in the UK, my higher-than-you'd-risk-in-Britain motorway pace needed reigning in, big time.

Now, with all five of us back home safely, I can only conclude that the 2015 BMW 320d M Sport Saloon is one of the most awe-inspiring compact executive motors ever. Yes, perhaps a Touring version of the 3 Series might have given us a bit more luggage space, but the car we had is still a decent family machine – and one I'd happily cross large swathes of Europe in again.





Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS

I was followed by the police the other day. Not because they like me or anything – I suspect it was more to do with the yellow and black Porsche 911 I was in.

Funnily enough, I'm not in the habit of driving like a boy racer now I'm in my 40s, and getting a ban for speeding isn't a great career move if you're a motoring journalist. So, doing 30mph through town with my five-year-old son strapped to his booster chair in the passenger seat was hardly the dodgiest thing to be doing on a Sunday.

I'm not being paranoid, the cops were going the other way and then did a 360 around the roundabout and tailed me for the next couple of miles, before deciding I wasn't a risk to the good people of Northamptonshire.

It could be my cynicism, and I'm not suggesting these boys in blue were frittering away our taxes, but I do think they had more of an interest in the blisteringly beautiful Carrera GTS. And who can blame them? It's an absolute stunner – whichever colour it's cloaked in.

The 911, under scrutiny here, has far more to it than looks, though. The GTS badge stands for Gran Turismo Sport – and, on this model, brings a 10mm drop in ride height. There are also an additional 30

horses tethered to the 3.8-litre flat six lump, producing 424bhp in total. Other extras tossed in to give the GTS extra effervescence include bi-xenon lamps, Sat Nav, limited slip diff and Porsche Torque Vectoring.

The rear of this 911 is broader, too, giving it a really aggressive stance – especially with matt black 20-inch wheels fitted at each corner. They

look fantastic, particularly against yellow. Porsche anoraks will also note that the four exhaust pipes and headlight surrounds are finished in the same shade.

The interior is typical Porsche design, but highlights are the GTS badges woven into the seats, and body coloured stitching on the Alcantara trim. The carbon fibre →

“BEHIND THE WHEEL, THE GTS FEELS SPADES MORE SPORTING THAN A STANDARD CARRERA S.”



**“ZERO TO 62MPH ARRIVES IN
JUST 4.0 SECONDS AND THE
TOP SPEED IS 188MPH.”**



on the doors, dash, seat base and console looks stunning, too.

Behind the wheel, the GTS feels spades more sporting than a standard Carrera S. I drove the big-ticket Carrera 4 GTS that was fitted with Porsche's optional seven-speed, double-clutch transmission. It's the gearbox to have, because it provides a seamless shift between manual and automatic control, so you lose virtually no power when changing gear. The '4', referred to above, simply indicates that the car has a four-wheel drive system. This delivers terrific

traction, allowing you to get on the power quicker out of a corner.

Indeed, the performance of the sports coupe is extraordinary. With the rapid changing auto transmission, the 911 Carrera 4 GTS drives as awesomely as it looks. The ride and handling is incisive, while the precision of the steering is second to none.

Zero to 62mph arrives in just 4.0 seconds and the top speed is 188mph. The sport exhaust adds roars and grumbles and those quad tailpipes emit a crackly howl during gear shifts. The 911 soaks up bumps

and mid-range pull is addictive. Certainly, the car's performance flirts above legal limits enough to keep you on your toes.

Quite honestly, the Porsche 911 Carrera 4 GTS is everything a sports coupe should be. It's pricey, though, so you'll need deep pockets to buy one. ■

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit carwriteups.co.uk.

 @carwriteups

PROS 'N' CONS

- Power ✓
- Looks ✓
- Thrills ✓
- Grip ✓
- Dear X

FAST FACTS

Max speed:

189mph

0-62mph:

4.0 secs

Combined mpg:

32.5

Engine layout:

3800cc,
six cylinder, petrol

Max power (bhp):

424

Max torque (lb ft):

325

CO2:

233g/km

Price:

£95,862



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We really want you to get hold of the best snaps, crackles and pops (we're taking fireworks, not Coco Pops) out there, so we've 'fused' together our top six. These little beauties will really put the bang in your bangers and the spark in your sparklers, so get ready to light up the sky!



1

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RRP £169.99
(Epic Price £84.95)



2

Smiley Face Rocket

Your adoring crowd will mirror this extraordinary firework when it hits the sky. The purple ring of twin stars surrounding two large green eyes and a red-starred smile will evoke happy faces all round. Emoticons will never hold the same charm again, and costing less than £15 it offers a pretty cheap laugh.

RRP £29.99
(Epic price £14.95)

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epicfireworks.com

3

Thunderous Finale

This is the one to save for last: a display that would make even Gandalf's eyes water. It lasts around 60 seconds and launches 80 shots – four at a time – into the air. These shots break into huge coloured palms like exploding shells to a background symphony of electrifying crackles.

RRP £129.99
(Epic price £64.95)



4

Momentum

This amazingly timed piece of sky art offers golden-red palms that explode with blue stars and falling strands of red and white glitter, five shots at a time. It's sure to get things moving along nicely.

RRP £99.99 (Epic price £49.95)



5

Predator 500

The Predator isn't likely to start feeding on you, but it will certainly hold your attention. With a fast-firing array of effects including peonies, bangs, crackles, whistles and an intense finale of large glitter storms, this little beast is a real family favourite.

RRP £79.99
(Epic price £39.95)



6

Heavyweight

The massive Heavyweight barrage by Epic Fireworks delivers super loud bangs and very pretty effects. This maximum calibre consumer firework has huge breaks that throw out vibrant multi colours in every direction. Sunshine yellows, bright greens, sea blues and cherry reds are just some of the fantastic rich colours of glitter that spread across the sky and twinkle and flash as they descend. This is a superb addition to any firework display.

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**Sorted.
TOP BUY**



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Healing Power of the Storytelling Brain



It must have felt like time stood still for those who witnessed close-up the appalling spectacle of the aircraft crash that devastated the 2015 Shoreham Air Show. When I watched the scene replayed on video, I could almost smell the acrid smoke that billowed up into the sky in a huge and deadly plume of black and orange. I could virtually feel the scorching heat as it seared the smooth glass screen of my computer whilst I sat in the safety and comfort of the music room in my house. I reflected on how fragile life can sometimes be and was thankful that I hadn't been there, when only last year I had watched the air show from the field next to where this year's tragedy occurred. Trauma and tragedy are some of the hardest things we may have to contend with, and such events touch many of us at some point in life. If any of us are ever afflicted in this way, we have an amazing resource available to us in the form of the hippocampus, part of the human brain. This is the storytelling part of the brain and it can help us achieve healing from even the greatest tragedies.

In his excellent book *Mindsight*, psychotherapist and global best-selling author Dr Daniel Siegel relates the story of a woman called

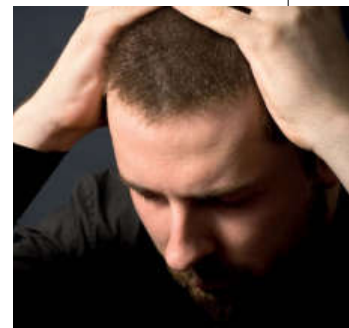
"TRAUMA AND TRAGEDY ARE SOME OF THE HARDEST THINGS WE MAY HAVE TO CONTEND WITH."

Allison who came to him for treatment because of persistent relationship problems. A few months into therapy, she mentioned that she'd been suffering intermittent back pain that had recently been getting worse to the point where surgery was her only remedy. Siegel helped his client to perform a body scan, a therapeutic technique designed to help the client focus internally and gradually notice the sensations in each part of the body by mentally scanning each part in turn, working upwards from the feet. When she reached her back, she quickly became lost in terror as she recalled images of being at a neighbour's house when someone attempted to sexually assault her on the corner of the table tennis table. He had jammed her back repeatedly into the table edge.

As Dr Siegel explored these recollections over a series of sessions, it gradually became clear that the attacker was in fact Allison's own stepfather. The trauma of the event had caused her hippocampus to shut down, leaving

her with only the generalised sensations (implicit memories) trapped in her body and no recollection of their origin. As Dr Siegel continued his therapeutic work with Allison and helped her recall what happened, her hippocampus was able to create a narrative and make sense of it, turning those implicit memories into an explicit recollection of her ordeal.

There is a popular misconception that we should try to avoid recalling horrific memories like these. The opposite can actually be true – recalling such traumatic events so that we can create a narrative about them actually helps the process of healing. Allison's is a remarkable story of recovery. The short-term discomfort of her therapeutic sessions brought a life-long benefit when her back pain disappeared and her scheduled surgery was cancelled. None of us ever want to have need of this healing process, but in case you ever do, remember that there is always hope. ■



Peter Horne is a qualified life coach with a passion for helping people change things in their lives when they feel stuck. He works with individuals and organisations, and can be contacted at enquiries@therealyou.eu. Peter is married with four children and attends St Peter's Church in Brighton.



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JW1106 Battle of Britain Spitfire Poppy Cufflinks - £99.99



Cufflinks
JW1106

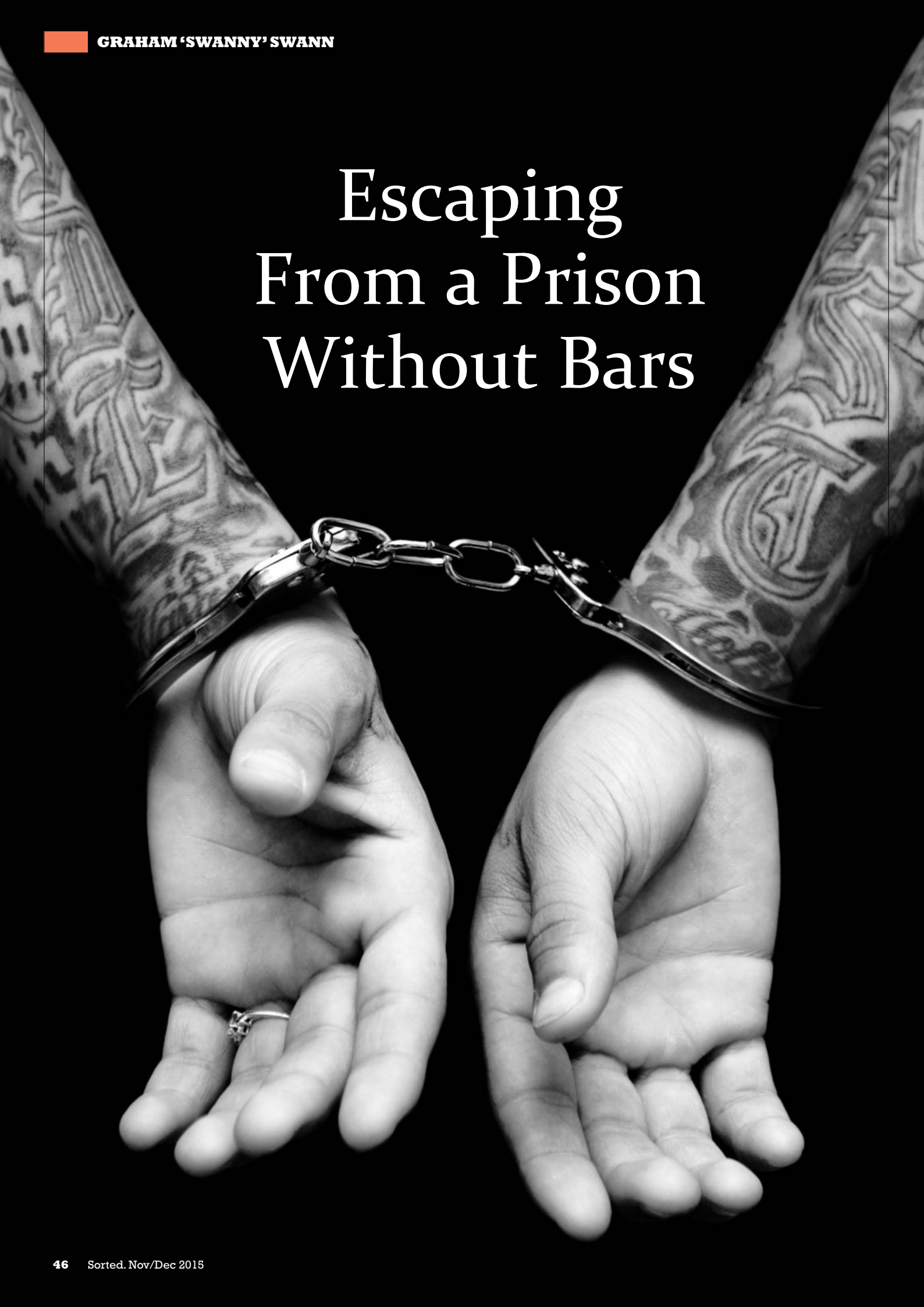


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Escaping From a Prison Without Bars





BY MARTIN LEGGATT

I'm talking to Swanny over the telephone – he's in the corner of a bar enjoying a cold drink and the Wi-Fi connection while escaping the sweltering heat of his Turkish holiday. I'm in a slightly cooler West Sussex. His enthusiasm and obvious sincerity strike rich as we talk about his book *Prison Without Bars*, which has attracted rave reviews on Amazon, giving it a five-star rating. The first thing that strikes me is how friendly and talkative Swanny is; he's just a normal bloke – the kind of man you'd enjoy a chat with over a pint in your local. And, boy, does he chat! Where I thought I might run out of questions, Swanny talks for

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a good 30 minutes before asking if I have any, and then resumes chatting with the same enthusiastic energy. Never mind that I'm interrupting his 50th birthday celebrations.

First interviewed by our editor, Steve Legg, at men's event The Gathering, Swanny was taking time out from running his tattoo and body piercing parlour in Loughborough to tell his story. Swanny's life had been transformed from a childhood of being bullied (which is putting it mildly; he endured the type of torture that we'd normal associate with the worst of war criminals), prolonged sexual abuse, through to a young adulthood of drink and gang violence. As is often the case, 'the hurt go on hurting' and by the time he turned 17 he was a father, "Not a dad," he emphasises, and in prison.

By the time he turned 26, Swanny was living on the streets and met a girl, Rachel, who would later become his wife. Still consumed by anger and unable to let go of his horrible past, Swanny would seek solace in drink, pain and self-pity. He was clinically depressed and haunted by his past, but never revealed any of what had happened to Rachel. Throughout this period, Swanny, who would never have professed to being a Christian or having any belief, never once blamed God, as some people do in a "Why are you letting this happen to me?" kind of way. There was no bitterness, just an immense amount of pain. As he says in the book, "The child I had been haunted the man I became." →





“MANY OF HIS CLIENTS ARE CHRISTIANS WHO VISIT HIM FOR TATTOOS, AND HE’LL ALWAYS ASK THEM TWO QUESTIONS: ‘WHAT AND WHY?’”

Then when he turned 40, Swanny met a man who told him all about Jesus, about how we are all separated from our God and that this creates a loneliness in all of us until we are reunited with God’s perfect love. Suddenly Swanny understood. Things made sense and he became a Christian, started to go to church and, as he puts it, “Perfect love drove away fear.” It was an amazing time. He recalls that he spent a lot of time crying and things inside him changed dramatically, although circumstances around him were not changing. He started to react to things differently; where before he would get angry and seek comfort in drink, he no longer needed to. His explanation: “Jesus fulfilled in a way booze couldn’t.”

When he was 45, another turning point came in Swanny’s life. While praying one day, he believes he distinctly heard from God: “Swanny, write a book. Thousands will be saved by this book.” His initial reaction was, “How can I?” After all, his school years had been ravaged by bullying and abuse; he’d had no education to speak of. It was at this point that David Shearman, a Nottingham-based minister, approached him and told him that he’d had a message from God that Swanny should write a book. Swanny prayed again, “God, I can’t write.” Then he saw a vision of a little boy crying, and that little boy was him. God told him, “Write for that little boy.” That confirmed it, and he started the four-year process of writing *Prison Without Bars*.

Since publication, countless people have been impacted by reading his book. People travel vast distances to his tattoo parlour just to meet with him and thank him for the book and the freedom that it has released in their own lives, from things such as self-harming, anger and forgiveness. It is, he rightly says, “Amazing stuff” – although Swanny takes no credit for this, all glory is to God. It’s an experience he says he finds “very humbling” and it’s just getting bigger, travelling further afield to places such as Canada, South Africa, America – “people can find anyone in this day and age” – and he gets thousands of random letters and emails of thanks from people impacted.

I ask him what is different about his story among an extensive field of similar books. It was something that he himself was very conscious of when writing the book, and he just wrote it as if chatting over a pint. His

publisher, Tim Pettingale, had never handled this kind of book before, but fell in love with its message the first time he read the manuscript. He told Swanny that “God is going to move mountains” with this book, and published it.

A lot of that has to do not only with the heart-breaking honesty of his story, but also the formula that he adopted to write it: “A lot of these testimonies have nine chapters of the writer telling you about the awful things that have happened to them and then the tenth ends abruptly when God saves them.” For him, the structure was always going to be a 50% split, with the first half talking about his old life and the second half about the effect faith has had on him. Swanny isn’t knocking the other books or their authors; it’s just that for him the second part of the story needs telling most. He pauses and emphasises: “I’m transformed, not changed. If you change, then you can change back. I’ve been transformed, me and my family.”

This is where he talks more about what forgiveness can do, and that transforming moment when you realise that we have this separation from Christ that is more painful to us than anything.

I bring up the subject of his profession of tattoo artist, and ask if he’s had any bad experiences. He tells me how he is “covered in them, on his arms, head, face neck, head, feet” and even in his mouth. This brings to mind a quote from his book where he tells his mum that when he grows up he’s “going to be like granddad and have loads of tattoos”. Many of them were done before he came to faith, and he has had all of the less *conservative*, shall we call them, burnt off; naked ladies and swear words. Occasionally he meets people who tell him he shouldn’t have tats, but what can he do? They are already there and an intrinsic part of who he is. He tells me how he has preached in Westminster Chapel and was greeted by senior minister Greg Haslam with the words, “Welcome, man of God – get in here and preach.”

Many of his clients are Christians who visit him for tattoos, and he’ll always ask them two questions: “What and why?” He asks them to consider what impact it will have, and if their design has any particular spiritual meaning to it. A lot of Christians opt for a gate design to symbolise passing from their old life into God’s perfect love and forgiveness. And for the people who disapprove? “The religious people who quote Leviticus, you can’t argue with them, you’ll just get mixed up with words,” he tells me. Instead he’ll quietly forgive.

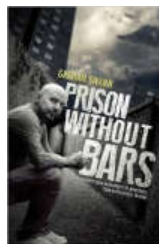
However, such incidents are few and far between and, as he says, at least people say it to his face. Such negative experiences are far outweighed by the amount of letters, emails and personal meetings from wives who approach him to thank him for his book, as they have experienced their husbands reading it and coming to faith. He finds this a huge blessing to see many fellow men set free, and set on fire for a new life.

Forgiveness is a huge part of Swanny’s story. For a man who had been a prisoner of such physical and emotional hurt for most of his life to be able to forgive and be free of the pain is incredible. He gets asked by people in similar circumstances, “How can you forgive when that person is dead?” and he replies that you have to; you’re not just forgiving what they have done, but setting yourself free. “If you don’t forgive, will it matter to them? No, but it will have a huge effect on you.”

Self-deprecating to the end, he admits that the book is an emotionally hard-hitting read that deliberately “hits like a left-hook”, but insists that lots of people could’ve written it; we’ve all been on the receiving end of some really bad stuff because sin is all around us all the time and affects us all. However, the book is much more than this; Tim Pettingale nicknamed it a “message of hope”.

“Any last words?” I ask him.

“Forgiveness is what it’s all about,” he replies. ■



Prison Without Bars by Graham ‘Swanny’ Swann (River Publishing) is available in paperback or Kindle edition from Amazon. @GrahamSwann65



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The Bigger Picture



When you first meet a man like Elly Chengo, smart in every sense of the word and full of life and wisdom, you don't even question how his life began. There's nothing about him that hints at anything other than a life well lived. But as you get to know him better, you begin to realise that the wisdom tells a story; it's gained through experience. There is a deep passion in this man to reach the least in the world to give them a chance of a better future. A passion that reflects a life released from poverty.

I met Elly on a recent trip to Kenya with UCB and Compassion, and took some time to find out what has made him the man is.

Can you explain what life was like for you ten years ago?

Ten years ago, my life was totally different; my family was very poor. I felt hopeless and had no determination. I had



no belief in myself because of the kind of life we were living as a family. It was not an environment you would desire for a child to grow up in. It was filled with people who were negative and didn't see much in you. I was surrounded by people who had lost hope and dropped out of school. They hadn't made much progress so they had lost the bigger picture.

How would you describe that kind of poverty to someone who has never experienced it?

For people out there who think someone can never go hungry, it's real. For people out there who can't imagine that some people can't pay school fees, it's real. For people out there who don't believe that some people have no clothes to wear or shoes to put on, it's real. When you put these things together, that is, in my own view, poverty. That was my life and the life of the people I grew up with.

Poverty is a lack of better choices in life. You are just trying to survive, so you don't have options. It is through poverty that someone can really give up in life. It is through poverty that someone can give up their God-given talent and skills because they feel they are not worth something.

But something happened to give you hope?

Yes, I was registered into a Compassion project. Since then I have been able to build my self-esteem, determination and the belief that I could be somebody in life. As I look back, I can see the hand of God in that. But the most important person who has really influenced my development was one of the Compassion project workers. I first met her ten years ago. She taught me that through education and by believing the Word of God, I could get out of the cycle of poverty and hopelessness that I found myself in. I have so much gratitude towards her.

Can you share more about your project director and what it was like to be part of Compassion's sponsorship programme?

My project director's name was Elizabeth Mudegu. She made me believe that there is hope in the Word of God. "Put your hope in God," she told me. "Let God work himself in you. He will work in you and you see he has a big plan for you."

She taught me to understand the value of education. She taught me that my determination and hard work would get me somewhere; it is not only your teachers but mostly your hard work that will help you. She met me when I was in Secondary School Form Two. →





I wasn't doing well, I was only going because I had to. But Elizabeth was firm with me, asking, "What is so good about finishing school without working hard and doing your best?" By the time I finished Form Four I was one of the best students in my class.

She also taught me to believe in myself. She gave me opportunities to grow and lead others and participate in events at the projects. At one point I was the praise and worship leader. She gave me responsibility to take care of people at camps or outings. She shared her life and how she had overcome things.

What have been some of the happiest times of your life?

One of the best times was when I graduated from college with a degree Science in Agricultural Biotechnology. Graduating from my Compassion project aged 22 was amazing too. I looked back at how God had transformed my life.

How has reflecting back on your own transformation affected how you work with other people?

It has made me want to help other people break out of the cycle of poverty. During my internship at college, we were working with communities in the Rift Valley in Kenya. I met a woman who was a widow with six children. Her husband died without leaving her anything and she lived in a mud hut with a leaking roof. Poverty constantly showed her she was not worth something in life. When we came to meet her, she decided to sit 100 metres away from where people were. Because of poverty she felt she could not even mingle with other people.

We empowered that woman economically. Now she has built her own home, has animals and runs a



business in the village. When we met her she never had any choice, but now she can go to a market and select what she wants. She can choose clothes and shoes and food. Her children can go to school without worrying about fees. Her choices have come through empowerment; we didn't give her those things, we just helped her to be able to do it for herself.

So, tell us a bit about your current job and what life is like for you now.

Today I work as a Partnership Facilitator for Compassion which means that I work with a cluster of Compassion projects in the Trans Mara region of Kenya, helping them to reach vulnerable children in their communities.

What I'm looking to do right now is to impact a child's life. My job is to reach out to children and reach out to church partners and work with them to transform the lives of children.



As a family we are also doing well. We've changed in the last ten years. I'm looking to influence more change in my family. I couldn't have imagined we would be where we are today.

You have come through huge challenges in your life. What would you say to someone else who is struggling at the moment?

I tell this to people whether they have lived in poverty or not. I tell them, tap into what you yourself do best. Do not do things because other people do them. Do the things that God has given you the opportunity to do. Poverty and other challenges in life can hinder people and cause them to overlook opportunities. So I'd say, try to keep your eyes on the bigger picture and be all that you were created to be. ■

To find out more about the work of Compassion and how you can support other children like Elly, visit compassionuk.org.



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BY FERGUS EWBANK

Carving out one of the greatest legacies in British film, it was over 50 years ago that Sean Connery first played James Bond in *Dr. No*. In the following decades, a handful of actors have shouldered the 007 codename, putting their own spin on Britain's least secret agent. Since taking on the role in 2005, Daniel Craig has won over audiences and critics alike with his own stamp on the iconic character. His is a postmodern take on Ian Fleming's Bond; one that embraces the best of the author's suave spy while adding an air of weariness and conflict. Craig's Bond is gruffer, meaner and more explosive than those before him. Gone are the cheesy one-liners and shaken martinis of predecessors Connery, Moore, Dalton and Brosnan. Instead, with Craig, we see a character pensive and existentially troubled, barely suppressing the rage within him.

The 24th Bond film since Connery's first face-off with *Dr. No*, *Spectre* marks Craig's fourth and likely final time playing 007. Directed by *Skyfall*'s Sam Mendes, *Spectre* marks the return of the eponymous extra-governmental organisation that figured prominently in the early Bond films. The film also stars Italian bombshell Monica Bellucci and French actress Léa Seydoux (*Blue is the Warmest Colour*) as two Bond girls who subvert the somewhat dated role women have taken in the franchise thus far. Returning cast members include Ralph Fiennes, taking over as M, Ben Whishaw as Q, and Naomie Harris as Miss Moneypenny, while Oscar-winning actor Christoph Waltz plays the arch-villain Franz Oberhauser.

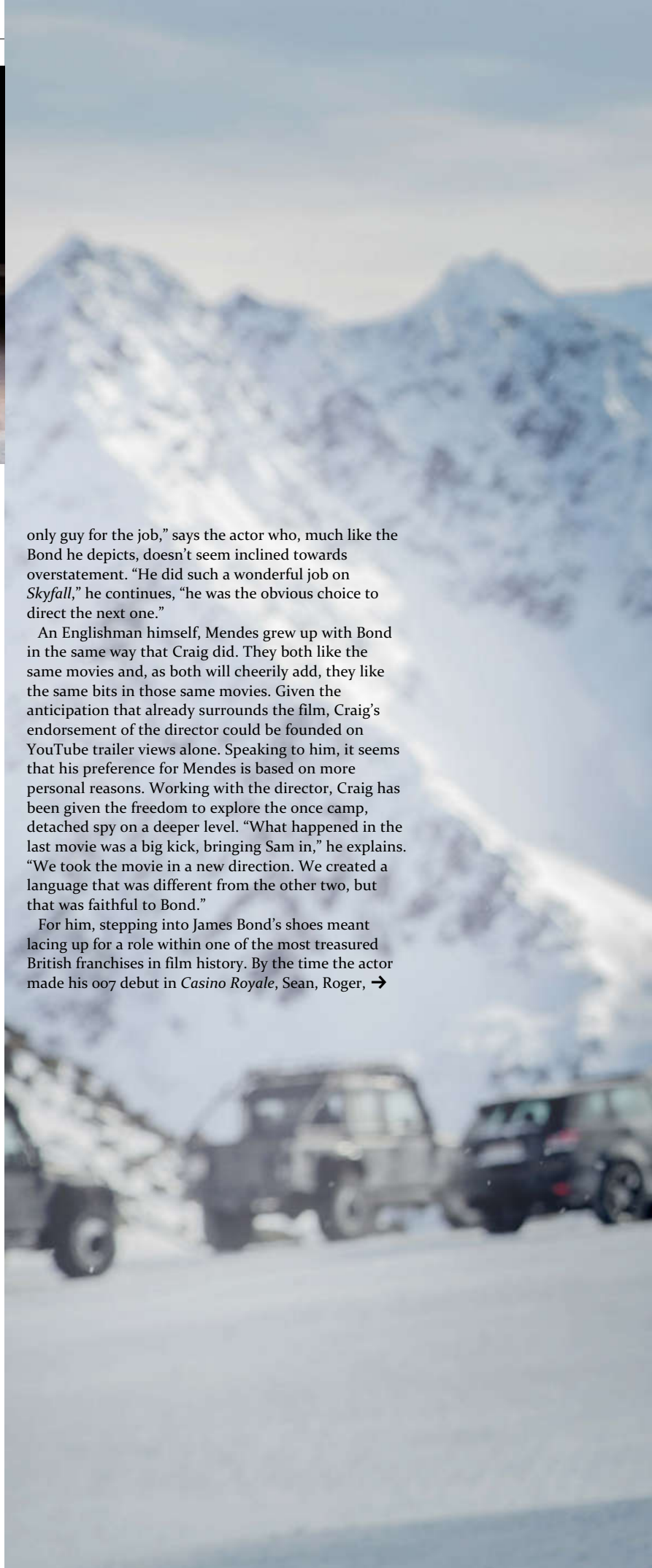
With Craig on camera and Mendes behind it, the pair's first outing together in *Skyfall* as a hugely successful one. Any scepticism towards either of them was soon forgotten as box office figures reached a dizzying \$1.1bn – nearly twice that of both *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace* – to become the 12th highest grossing film of all time, and the most successful Bond to date.

As Craig is all too ready to agree, Mendes knows how to put together a good 007 movie. "Sam Mendes was the

only guy for the job," says the actor who, much like the Bond he depicts, doesn't seem inclined towards overstatement. "He did such a wonderful job on *Skyfall*," he continues, "he was the obvious choice to direct the next one."

An Englishman himself, Mendes grew up with Bond in the same way that Craig did. They both like the same movies and, as both will cheerily add, they like the same bits in those same movies. Given the anticipation that already surrounds the film, Craig's endorsement of the director could be founded on YouTube trailer views alone. Speaking to him, it seems that his preference for Mendes is based on more personal reasons. Working with the director, Craig has been given the freedom to explore the once camp, detached spy on a deeper level. "What happened in the last movie was a big kick, bringing Sam in," he explains. "We took the movie in a new direction. We created a language that was different from the other two, but that was faithful to Bond."

For him, stepping into James Bond's shoes meant lacing up for a role within one of the most treasured British franchises in film history. By the time the actor made his 007 debut in *Casino Royale*, Sean, Roger, →



“STEPPING INTO JAMES BOND’S SHOES MEANT LACING UP FOR A ROLE WITHIN ONE OF THE MOST TREASURED BRITISH FRANCHISES IN FILM HISTORY.”

A full-page background image of James Bond (Daniel Craig) in a dark, quilted jacket and sunglasses, holding a handgun, standing in a snowy mountain landscape. The title text is overlaid on the image.

Bond Returns...

... but not as we know him.
The cast of *Spectre* explain
how the latest 007 movie
brings Bond bang up to date.



“SHE DOESN’T NEED BOND, SHE DOESN’T WANT TO BE PART OF HIS WORLD. SHE’S NOT IMPRESSED.”

Timothy and Pierce had already given their interpretation of the spy. He admits, “I couldn’t come in and go, ‘Hmm, Martini,’ or whatever. It’s not who I am.”

While the early Sean Connery films were able to exist within a league of their own, in what was then relatively uncharted space, the secret agent motif now makes for the basis of a fairly commonplace screenwriting template. As such, the Bond of today joins a string of spy film franchises and, thereby, always risks becoming somewhat of a pastiche.

Craig was keen to rethink the formula and take things back to the start. “The original Bond was always in turmoil with himself, always questioning,” he explains. “Maybe he got smoother as the books went on. But going back to the beginning, it’s the way I approach my work. I’m aware it’s a Bond movie and always remains a Bond movie. I’ve just always felt there should be an element of truth or emotion in a movie, so that the audience can hook in. If it’s only action, then it’s not the complete picture.”

While discerning viewers might once have picked up on an occasional storyline or character link in past films, they were, for the most part, unconnected episodes. During Craig’s 007 residency, this has changed and an overarching narrative has begun to emerge. Better thought of as S.P.E.C.T.R.E, the title for his latest film is an anagram for Special Executive for Counter-intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion – a global terrorist organisation that featured heavily in Fleming’s novels and in *Dr. No*.

Speculation of a return from Blofeld, the infamous cat-stroking villain of that movie, has turned out to be wrong. However, clued-up fans will notice that by going back to the beginning, there exists a link within Fleming’s novels.

The villain of *Spectre* is Franz Oberhauser, the son of Hannes Oberhauser. A friend of Bond’s father, Hannes was an Austrian climbing and ski instructor who briefly became the young Bond’s guardian after the tragic death of his parents – in, no less, an Alpine climbing accident. Death, family ties and characters racked with inner turmoil – it all feels a little Shakespearean. Then again, it’s probably fair to say that the essence of much modern drama has its basis in *The Bard*.

So often in big-budget action films, the conflict is played out visually – with machine guns and big explosions – which is all well and good, but 24 films in and viewers begin to expect a touch more substance. In *Spectre*, Craig delivers weight and meaning to his character – there’s still a licence to kill, but it’s accompanied by a significant level of inner turmoil.

Actress Léa Seydoux, who plays Madeleine Swann alongside Bond in the film, agrees. “I think this is what’s new in the film, it’s not what you can expect from a Bond film. It’s more much intense, complex and deep.” She talks not only about Craig’s redefinition of the leading spy but also how this ties in with Mendes’ more modern treatment of the ‘Bond girl’ role. The decision to cast 50-year-old Monica Bellucci does away with Hollywood stigma regarding age and beauty. The oldest actress ever to be cast as a “Bond woman”, as she puts it, Bellucci’s character not only proves that beauty is ageless but also lays bare the misogynistic tendencies that have run a course through the films to date.

As one of the very few love interests to be older than Bond rather than a decade his junior, Bellucci’s part levels the playing field. It serves to suggest that women should take charge of their sensuality, and that being desirable is much more a function of one’s sense of identity than pure physical attractiveness. Admittedly, given that her character, Lucia Sciarra, ultimately succumbs to Bond anyway, there’s still some distance to go but, for Bellucci, it’s a move in the right direction. “I think it’s a sign that women deserve to be respected and considered beautiful at any age. Sensuality and sexiness does not just belong to women in their 20s or 30s,” she says. “We shouldn’t be made to feel as if we are no longer interesting or sexy at 50 as compared to when we’re 30.”

So what about the ‘feisty’ Bond girl played by Seydoux? “Yes, she is different,” says the actress. “My character, she’s something important, she’s Bond’s equal. She doesn’t need Bond, she doesn’t want to be part of his world. She’s not impressed.” As with Bellucci, Seydoux is keen to emphasise how the role of women has shifted in the film. Far from the stereotypical Bond girl, Léa’s character, Madeleine, is not only uninterested in Bond’s protection, but is also the daughter of his enemy.

Like Bond, Madeleine is not without her complexities. When Seydoux took on the part, there





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was, at that point, no script to be read, and only the bare bones of a plot. Mendes encouraged his cast to develop their characters subjectively, as Craig has done over his past three films. It worked for Seydoux as it did for Craig. “When I act,” she says, pausing for a moment’s thought, “it’s always about the emotions you give. It’s even subjective. It’s a sensation. It’s not I want to play that, play this, it’s much more mysterious in a way.”

The idea of interpretation is an important one when it comes to modern Bond. On the one hand, Mendes, Craig and fellow cast members are faced with the task of creating a contemporary Bond that’s relevant and attuned to the society in which it is set. On the other, the film cannot be allowed to stray too far from its conception. Though *Spectre* displays a Bond refined for modern viewers, Ian Fleming’s original novels were reading material for director and cast alike. “We always go back to Fleming,” says Craig. “We just do it. You have to.”

For him, Fleming “literally changed the face of movie-making in the 60s. The legacy is incredible”. And in nowhere, perhaps, is that legacy more apparent than Bond’s choice of vehicle. Generations have been left captivated by all manner of kitted-out cars, but it’s the series of Aston Martins that have come to define 007.

Happily for Craig, it’s business as usual in *Spectre*. “I literally have to pace myself,” he says, describing his return to the seat of the latest car. “I was driving an Aston Martin around Rome and I’d be numb not to get excited about that.” Something for Bond and only Bond, the DBio car featured in the film will never go into production for public sale. A one-of-a-kind, the model was designed to celebrate the franchise’s 50th

anniversary and the equally long relationship with the manufacturer. That relationship began with what is now the most famous Bond car of all, the DB5, and in designing the latest model, the Aston team and Mendes have paid much homage.

A sinister, modern machine, complete with a featherweight carbon fibre skin for added ferocity, the DBio is a fitting analogy for Craig’s portrayal of his character. In its simple, sleek lines, there’s an undeniable resemblance to Bond’s first machine and, in that, an allusion to the films in which Connery drove it. Through the ancestry of its design, the DBio traces the lineage of every Bond car before it. As the latest offspring in a bloodline of gizmo-laden vehicles, the DBio is a particularly fitting celebration of half a century of James Bond films. As with the majority that have come before it, the car has its fair share of weaponry and gadgets – a complex series of hidden guns, and a flamethrower in the boot – handy additions from Bond’s tech-guru Q.

Q’s seemingly infallible ability to predict what Bond is likely to come up against (even before Bond does) remains as important to the storyline as ever. While Craig’s character may well be more complex, more conflicted, perhaps even a little weary, in each of those gadgets exists an opportunity for escape and survival. Though the modern Bond seems to teeter ever closer to breaking point, there is never a moment where the audience believes he won’t survive. How long the franchise will continue is uncertain but, as we reach the release of *Spectre*, we can be sure of one thing. Through suicidal driving, megalomaniac supervillains and terrifying henchman, Bond will always emerge at the other end – shaken, not stirred. ■

**“NINE MONTHS
LATER, I WON THE
EUROPEAN POKER
TOUR IN SAN REMO
FOR OVER A MILLION
DOLLARS.”**



Jason Mercier: Poker Face

Jason Mercier is a professional poker player from Florida. At the age of just 28, his total poker earnings amount to over \$15 million and he's a PokerStars sponsored pro. He's won three World Series of Poker (WSOP) bracelets and two European Poker Tournament (EPT) championships. I caught up with him at a tournament in Barcelona, to ask him about poker – and his faith in God.

BY SAMANTHA REA

What came first, poker or faith?

I grew up going to church all the time, all my family are Christian, but I struggled in my late teenage years. There was never a point when I altogether didn't believe. It was more that I went through a phase when my belief system wasn't as strong. I felt like, "I don't believe the same way you guys do" or "it's just not for me" or "I'm not really sure". I just kind of lived my life not thinking about it.

Two years ago, I had some experiences that have led me back to God. It's personal, but I now have a renewed faith in God and Christianity. I'm much more open to talking about it. I get into conversations fairly frequently about God, Christianity and religion.

Do you ever talk about Christianity at the poker table?

It's rare to get into discussions or religious debates at the poker table, but when I have done, it's been very friendly, it's never been hostile.

I feel like I don't know enough to debate it. A lot of times, I'll be left wanting to ask someone, like my dad or my brother, so I'm better prepared. I'll ask them: "If somebody says this, what do you say back?" They usually have pretty good advice.

I don't try to convince anyone, because most people you get into conversations with aren't really the type to get swayed by your opinion. Sometimes I get into arguments – sometimes it's unavoidable. It starts out like, "Let's just have a discussion." Then it turns into: "YOU'RE WRONG."

In general, I try to not get angry or upset, I just explain my point of view and what I believe. I might ask them a question or two to make them think about what they believe and why they believe it – to question if what they believe is accurate.

A lot of people try to argue that the earth is 4 billion years old, but in the Bible it doesn't say how old the earth is. Besides, time doesn't apply to God – God doesn't operate on time, it's a man-made instrument.

If someone quotes Nietzsche and says, "God didn't make man, man invented God," I say that's just an opinion. My opinion is that God made man, and all men

stem from Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman. That's from the Bible, so it leads to all sorts of arguments about whether the Bible is accurate – and that's a whole new debate.

How do your parents feel about you playing poker?

Initially, it was a major issue. When I first started playing, I knew they'd be against it, so I kept it a secret. I played poker with my friends and didn't tell them.

When I was 18, I started playing online. When my parents found out, it was a big problem and it became an ongoing struggle between us. There were multiple issues – it wasn't just poker. I was missing classes and flunking out of school, so they were very much against everything I was doing. They told me I couldn't come home... so I had to figure out what I was going to do and where I was going to live. I stayed with a friend for the summer, then went to my parents and told them I was going to stop playing poker.

I stopped for two months. Then I started playing again, and kept it from my parents. After a while, I couldn't hide it anymore – I told them I was playing. I said they could kick me out if they wanted to, but I explained why I thought it was different to gambling and why I wanted to keep doing it.

We agreed on some terms. They said as long as I was going to school, getting good grades and working a job, I could play 15 hours a week. But to me, that was a green light to play whenever I wanted to.

I felt like I was lying to them, and not being honest about what I was doing, so it took a little bit before I was finally like, "I gotta tell 'em."

It wasn't until I moved out and I was making a very good living from cards, that my parents were much more supportive of it. Once they saw the potential for travelling and playing live tournaments, and understood it as a sport, rather than a casino game, they were much more accepting of it.

What was your parents' main concern about you playing poker?

My parents were against all gambling. I remember when I was 11 or 12, I made a \$10 bet against my uncle on the Super Bowl. I won, but when my parents found out, →

I got in so much trouble. They made me give the money back to my uncle. They were very much against all forms of gambling.

How were you able to persuade your parents to consider poker as a career?

It took a while for my parents to understand it. They'd been asking me where I was going to university in the fall, and I kept saying, "I don't know." I was playing poker, trying to make a living, and my plan was to not go to university. So at this point I had to tell them I'd been playing 50 hours a week, making x amount.

My parents were shocked at how much money I'd made and the potential that was there – I had tournaments lined up in Monte Carlo and the Caribbean. They didn't know what to say except, "Looks like you've got it figured out, so we're just gonna let you do your thing." At this point, I bought a place, moved out and started playing full-time. Nine months later, I won the European Poker Tour in San Remo for over a million dollars, so then it was like, "OK, we're just gonna let him play."

It took some time for them to come on board, but now my dad follows the live updates when I'm playing. He'll stay up all night and sweat. My dad's asked questions, so despite never playing, he has a very good grasp of Texas Hold'em and what happens in tournaments. My mom doesn't really know what's going on, she just looks to make sure that I've won.

Do your parents ever come and watch you play in tournaments?

Sometimes – they both came to watch me play the \$25K in Florida last week, so they were very excited about that. It was the first time they'd seen me win, which is crazy because I've won so many tournaments. It was pretty cool for them to be there for a win, but they've actually come to Vegas a couple of times for the World Series of Poker and to the Bahamas for the PokerStars Caribbean Adventure.

Poker tournaments tend to be held in casinos – how do your parents feel about coming into casinos to watch you play?

I don't think that's an issue. My dad used to work in production, so he's had to work in casinos before. They're not necessarily against casinos in general, it's rather that they've always viewed gambling as a slippery slope. It's something you don't want to do because you don't want to get addicted to it – work hard for your money, don't just give it away.

You spend a lot of time travelling on the poker circuit – how often do you manage to go to church?

I go to a non-denominational church about once a month – just because I'm on the road so much. I've gone a few times when I've been in Vegas and here in Barcelona I've been to the Sagrada Familia. It wasn't for a service – it's more like a museum – but it was a very beautiful and cool experience.

I think it would be nice if I made a little effort to visit some churches, especially over here in Europe. It's difficult because I have tournaments to play and I have to fit in sleep. I can be playing poker until one in the morning on a Saturday – then on a Sunday, I have a tournament starting at noon. I'd also have to find a church to go to, so I just try to go when I'm home.

In Christianity it's not like you *have* to be at church every Sunday. You *should* go, if you can, but I think a man has a responsibility to his family and to himself to make a living and sometimes that comes with sacrifices. There's family time and church time. I only feel guilty for not going on a Sunday if I'm home. If I'm up all



"GAMBLING, WOMEN, DRINKING, DRUGS – THEY'RE ALL PREVALENT IN POKER, AND AVOIDING THEM IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT."

night and miss church because I sleep in, then I'd feel guilty, but I don't feel guilty about not going when I'm on the road.

I can see you're wearing two crucifixes. Can you tell me about them – do they have a special meaning for you?

They both have special meaning. This smaller one, I bought it off my brother, when I was nine or ten years old. It represents working hard and earning what you want. It represents family to me, because it was my brother's originally. This larger one, I actually found when I was 15 years old. I was bagging groceries in a parking lot. I should have probably turned it in, but I decided to keep it.

My parents were so strict, I didn't even show them that I found it when I did, because they'd have made me return it. I ended up finding it in my stuff two years ago. I was like, "Wow, this is really cool."

It's crazy I kept it all this time. I only recently started wearing it out. A lot of people keep saying, "Oh, nice Jesus piece." I just say "Thanks." For me, anything that brings forth the name of Jesus and encourages people to talk about him, or see that I represent him, I think is a good thing.

How do the people who go to your church feel about you playing poker for a living?

Most people view it as really cool. I haven't had anyone say they're against it. If anything, they're excited to see me and ask me how it's going.

Is charity an important part of your life? Do you give away a certain amount of your winnings?

Yeah. It's not exactly charity, but I give to the church that I go to. I usually give a lump sum, once a year, based on how the year's going for me financially. They use that money to either support the church, or support missions trips or other churches.

Looking to the future, when you get married, is it important to you that it's to someone who shares your beliefs?

Yeah, for sure. I've gone on dates with girls where they've told me they think God doesn't exist, and right away I know that's not the right person for me. It's very important to me that my significant other would have the same belief system as me.

Does your Christianity affect your poker – or vice versa?

There can be a lot of temptation in this industry. Gambling, women, drinking, drugs – they're all prevalent in poker, and avoiding them is sometimes difficult. I don't cut out alcohol completely, but I've gone through periods when I haven't drunk any. I just try to live as a Christian. Sometimes it's difficult, but I try my best.

What does living as a Christian mean to you?

The most important thing about being a Christian is having faith. It's believing that Jesus died on the cross and was brought back to life and is the Son of God. That's the beginning – the rest is how you live and why you do what you're doing. It's about being kind and generous and living the right way – just trying to be how Jesus was. ■



Tails I Lose

BY JUSTYN REES-LARCOMBE

I had it all – the house, fast cars, a well-paid job in finance and a lovely family. Then, in November 2012 my life came off the tracks with catastrophic consequences. I had hidden a three-year addiction to online casinos. When my wife found out I had spent all our savings and lost my job because of my habit, she left, taking our two young boys with her. Homeless, heavily in debt and considering taking my life, I turned back to Christ.

Since then I have found wonderful restoration, and now travel the country sharing my story of hope and reconciliation. I am often asked what attitude Christians should take in relation to gambling – is it wrong, is it a sin? Here are some figures published by the Gambling Commission that might surprise.

Three-quarters of all adults in the UK gamble regularly, 90% of whom gamble responsibly; 9% are at risk of becoming 'problem gamblers' and about 1% have a compulsion to gamble that can lead to severe debt, marital break-up and even suicide. The gambling industry say it's a small percentage, but the number is huge. That 1% represents almost 400,000 people in misery, plus all the people around them who are affected.

Gambling is big business in the UK, with revenues of £3.5 billion a year. There are some exceptional individuals who manage to beat the odds. Jason is one of them. But Jason is not a compulsive, or problem gambler.

As gambling advertising increases and smart phone technology proliferates, my heart is for our young people who are being normalised into thinking that gambling is fun, that it has no down side. But for many, it leads to misery.

So is gambling wrong? In itself – no, but for many it's a slippery slope that leads to a very dark place. As Christians, we need to do more to protect the vulnerable. Because the reality is, despite the advertising, many more people will experience the same destruction I did, than the rewards of Jason.

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In Fear and Faith

In his younger years, master of illusion Derren Brown was an evangelical Christian. Nowadays, he is a firm atheist. What happened to change his mind about his faith? *Sorted* speaks to the man himself to uncover his journey from devoutness to disbelief.

BY SHAUN CURRAN

Derren Brown's professional life has been a constant exploration of what is real, and what is not. Throughout a career on TV, on stage and, latterly, on the page, Brown has continually shifted perceptions about his work and its themes to the point where you're not even sure how you would define what it is he actually does. Is he a magician? Hypnotist? Mentalist? Illusionist? Sceptic? Or just an old-fashioned performer with a couple of neat tricks to wow the audience? The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle of it all, and that is just how Brown precisely constructs it; he revels in the vague and undefined. He has a huge, dedicated following, all addicted to his boundary pushing – and at times controversial – work that has in the past included a live Russian Roulette show, predicting the national lottery numbers and convincing a group of innocent businesspeople to rob a bank at gunpoint.

Aspects of his personal life have been just as fiercely dedicated to questioning what he believes in – be it the battle between good and bad, right and wrong, true and false. Inevitably, this includes matters of faith; a subject that has, for better and worse, defined Brown's life since his younger years right up until the present day.

In true Brown fashion, the question of his own faith has not been a straightforward one. When he calls *Sorted*, the illusionist is more than happy to spend time recounting tales from his youth, all of which contributed to his current standing. The succinct version of Brown's story is that he used to be devoutly religious when he was younger and grew out of it to such an extent that he is now one of the most famous atheists in the country, alongside Richard Dawkins and Ricky Gervais.

But that would be a far too simplified account of Brown's transition. To fully understand his path from Christianity to disbelief, one has to go back to his pre-adolescence. Brown was born on 27 February 1971 in

Putney, south-west London to mother and father Chris and Bob Brown, the latter of whom was a sports teacher at the private Whitgift School in Croydon that Brown attended from the age of ten. By that stage, Brown was already deeply committed to Christianity, a regular Sunday school attendee, and enjoying the feeling of belonging to something he could believe in.


"I was a proper believer," he told the *Daily Mail*. "I'd been to a Sunday school class when I was five and maintained my beliefs for many years. With the self-assurance of the truly naive, I would sit down and tell my friends why they should be Christians."

Initially, this faith would come as a comfort to him. At Whitgift – "a posh grammar school with peacocks and quadrangles and things," he laughs – Brown felt an acute displacement and a sense that he was struggling to fit in. Quiet and awkward, the athletic pressures piled on by the school and fellow pupils brought about feelings of unease.

"At school, I was definitely in the wrong crowd," he admits, albeit recalling a fairly sad time in his life with a touch of his distinctly wry wit. "Not in the cool sense, it was just embarrassing. I was in a group of kids who liked classical music. I didn't even like classical music! I was just in with the wrong crowd. So that wasn't great. I wasn't very sporty but my dad was a sports teacher at the school. And I think if he hadn't have been I would have got properly bullied. I wasn't but I was very much intimidated by the sporty crowd and it was a very sporty school."

Today, his memories echo some of the recent comments he gave *The Guardian* about his teenage years: "As I grew up, I didn't go out drinking, wasn't going to the gym, I didn't fit into that whole world. That feeling of alienation can turn into envy, and it becomes an issue." He then mentioned the crux of his issues, "Sexuality is often tied in with something you feel you lack in yourself and look for in others."

As his adolescence gathered pace, so did his awareness of his own sexuality, and it is only with hindsight that Brown can make sense of what he was →



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feeling, and the impact that had on his faith. He recognises now that a difficult relationship with his father also wasn't helping matters. "It was tough and unhealthy, the classic thing," he said to the *Daily Mail*. "Not getting on with my father, not fitting in with the boys at school, at that age you don't know whether that happens because you're gay, or if you're gay because of them." He says the uncertainty lasted some time. "For years I was rather embarrassed about it, hoping it would pass, and was basically celibate."

Though it wasn't as pronounced and deliberately devious as it may seem looking back, Brown was essentially using his faith to cover up his gay feelings, using it as a shield to deflect the personal questions he was desperately trying to avoid. It also had the desired effect of handing him the readymade selfhood that he was searching for. "Belief becomes part of your identity. And if you feel not very impressive, it's a good feeling to be able to go, 'Oh, sorry, could you not make that joke please, because I'm a Christian.'" Brown's self-deprecation is audible.

Another way to seek the acceptance he craved was to throw himself into the world of magic, which in turn would gradually steer him away from Christianity. Magic had always been a curiosity of Brown's – "I did have a magic set when I was young and had a free-floating interest" – but it started up again in earnest when Brown went to study Law and German at the University of Bristol. "It became much more serious then," he reveals.

Suddenly, Brown found that where previously he was ignored, he was now the centre of attention. It was a scenario that fits into the stereotype. "Magicians tend to be kids with no social confidence," he told the *Mail*. "You rely on the tricks; hide behind the cards as a way to social acceptance. That was me for many years."

He was now in a situation where he was lauding power over those who had previously helped cultivate his outsider status. "The people who often responded well to it were the lads, and suddenly I was in the position of a) being quite cool among them, and b) having control of them, which is very different from being intimidated by them. I was suddenly an authority in this world."

As he began to perform regularly at university, Brown became addicted to both the theory and the exhibition of magic, setting him on the path to fame and fortune. But he admits that it was to be the beginning of the end for his faith. The Christian Union, initially a refuge for Brown, turned against him once they saw early versions of his act, and thought that his attempts at hypnosis were proof he had been possessed by the devil.

"I immediately got this backlash of anger from them," he told the *Mail*. "I had people exorcising me during my shows. They really attacked me. I started to see there was a capacity for fear and misunderstanding in the church. Learning hypnosis taught me how suggestion works and studying magic gave me an understanding of how charlatans work."

"So suddenly, when I'd hear my minister saying Tarot cards were the work of the devil, I said to myself, 'Well, they're not. There's no magic happening. I know it isn't'. So, bit by bit, I began disassembling my religious beliefs."

By now, Brown was feeling more confident about his sexuality – within himself, at least – and far less of the guilt that had plagued him. Curious, he agreed to go to a church-organised camp that promised people they could 'cure' their sexuality – sceptical to begin with, the experience left him unimpressed and more disconnected with his faith than ever.

"I had a friend who was very into that movement and he had heard of a course that people went on," he told Alan Carr on *Chatty Man*, "and it's not uncommon for you to go through a phase where you think 'maybe it



"I AM AN ATHEIST AND A SCEPTIC OF ALL THINGS PARANORMAL."

will pass'. So I went along for a day or two with this friend and they had this whole method of 'curing it' as they said. I do think some of the psychology is interesting, as sexuality is a complicated thing and I could understand some of what they were saying. But it just doesn't work, and that is the bit that they were missing. They had this moment where I was asking 'So, do you no longer feel attracted to people from the same sex?' and they would say, 'Well, the Lord has shown me a way of dealing with those feelings when I get them'. And I'd be like, 'So you still get those feelings? It's not really worked, has it?' One guy would go (puts on exaggerated camp accent), 'The Lord has given me a fabulous wife!' It just doesn't work."

It was the final nail in the coffin, and for Brown magic had now completely replaced religion – today, his official website proudly states: "I am an atheist and a sceptic of all things paranormal. As an atheist, I merely do not believe, which is not the same as having an anti-theist agenda."

Professionally, the decision was one of the best he ever made. By honing his act and becoming ever more daring with his technique and performances, he became the most famous exponent of illusion in a generation, and his nationwide tours are still phenomenally popular. Still, faith has pervaded his work – most famously on his 2012 TV show *Fear and Faith*, which examined the psychology of religious belief and in which he conducted a 'Conversion Experience' to induce a religious experience in a self-identified non-believer.

Emboldened by fame, Brown eventually came out →

"IF YOU CARRY SOMETHING AROUND WITH YOU FOR A LONG TIME THAT YOU MAKE INTO A BIG SECRET, YOU TURN IT INTO A MUCH BIGGER THING THAT IT ACTUALLY IS!"

at the height of his popularity during his 30s. After decades of bottling up his feelings, worrying about what others would think and using religion to hide the truth, the experience was nowhere near as traumatic as Brown had always envisaged.

"With something like that, if you carry something around with you for a long time that you make into a big secret, you turn it into a much bigger thing that it actually is!" he laughs, thinking back. "What you think other people are going to think doesn't bear relation to what they actually do and what is interesting is someone trying to hide something that is actually quite self-evident – that's much more interesting to people than who you fancy. Afterwards you think, 'Oh why on earth did I turn this into such a big deal?' It seems less so nowadays than years ago, it is a little easier now but what it does do is make you realise that – I think David



Tricky Situation

BY STEVE LEGG

As a fellow member of the Magic Circle and someone who has shared Derren's passion for the theory and practice of illusion, I am disappointed in the reaction that he received from the Christians that he knew. The truth is – what he, and I for that matter, do, is nothing more than tricks, sleight of hand and a great deal of chutzpah.

We grew up around the same time, yet our experiences couldn't be more different. Derren was deeply unfortunate in the people he was surrounded by. I have faced the odd criticism for 'practising magic' and there are a couple of churches who wouldn't book me to perform because of it – but there are many more who would and do; I have certainly never been subjected to an 'exorcism' or anything like it.

I believe that there is great room for morally neutral events to be used either for good or for evil. There are some people in the world who will use 'magic' to con and deceive people, but they are few and far between. I have used tricks and seemingly impossible stunts to entertain people and explain the good news about Jesus for nearly 30 years.

Derren's great skills as an illusionist have led him to 'doubt' all things paranormal, and certainly to be cynical about the existence of God and his ability to do 'supernatural things'. Faith is exactly what it says on the tin – a decision to believe in something we can't necessarily empirically prove. But I believe and have, in fact, seen God act in ways that I can't explain away with secrets from the Magic Circle. Derren Brown is a master illusionist, but God? He's the real deal.

Derren Brown is currently touring the UK with his new show, 'Miracle'. Tickets and info at derrenbrown.co.uk.

Foster Wallace said it – you'd be a lot less worried about what other people think of you when you realise how seldom they do! That's what it taught me, in the nicest way, other people don't really care," he says earnestly.

It is a lesson that he preaches constantly. When asked what piece of advice he would give to his younger self, Brown replied, "There's no God and no one cares if you're gay." It has been an arduous, personally taxing journey for the master of magic to get to that point – and rightly or wrongly, there appears to be no chance of him turning back any time soon. ■



Reasons to Believe

BY ANDY KIND

As someone who has worked in comedy for a decade, I'm all too aware of the general scepticism and cynicism that surrounds Christian faith. In fairness to Derren, and unlike a lot of my comedy comrades, he is neither aggressive nor antagonistic, and he has thought through his beliefs.

However, there are three thoughts I'd like to offer humbly in response, on the topics of scepticism, psychology and fear.

1 While being a self-styled 'sceptic' is cool these days – conveying the idea that you're someone who grapples earnestly with truth – scepticism in the end is self-defeating. Because to be a true sceptic you need to be sceptical about your own scepticism, which can leave you in one big philosophical muddle.

2 Understanding the psychology of something does nothing to disprove the truth beneath that psychology. There seems to be a suggestion by many that because Christianity offers something to believe in, therefore there is no God. Which is like saying that you only go to the doctor's when you're worried you're ill... and so there is no doctor's. (Insert satirical Big Society joke here).

3 Biblical Christianity is not a religion of fear. Indeed, perfect love (God's love) casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). Nor is it a shield from an opposing reality, but a way of being equipped to live in true reality: "In this world you will have trouble", says Jesus, But take heart! For I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV). Christianity is ultimately about what Jesus offers in John 10:10 – fullness of life. That fullness starts here and now, not after death.

Derren Brown's stage show is a good analogy for what being a Christian means. It's not magic, but it is captivatingly brilliant.

Andy Kind is a comedian and award-winning author.

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No Child Taken

For Cambodian children to be secure from the lure of traffickers, they need to grow up knowing they will be able to earn a living in their own communities.

I have lost count of the number of times that I have talked about my boy to fellow parents around the world. The love of children is one of those things that cuts across cultures – it's a universal love, cemented through the sharing of a photo, an exchange of names, and a smile.

BY JAMIE FYLEMAN, DIRECTOR OF CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS AT TEARFUND

In my work for Tearfund, over the last couple of years I've travelled across Asia following the trail of human traffickers. Today, more children are enslaved than at any other point in history. Trafficking is the world's fastest growing crime and one of the biggest too, just behind drugs and guns.

Every 30 seconds a child is taken – often facing not only unimaginable but also unspeakable fates. I've also learned that every 30 seconds a parent is devastated too.

Take Sambo, who lived in rural Cambodia. I met him a few months ago. Life for Sambo was difficult. Climate change forced him, along with many other fathers in his village, to travel to the city to find work. Failing crops, due to increased flooding and hotter summers, meant they simply weren't growing enough to feed their families.

Sambo left his sons and wife at home while he set about providing for his family. It became a costly mistake. While he was away, people traffickers came to his village. "They tricked my wife and my children," Sambo told me, "and they took my boys to Thailand."

Preying on the families' poverty and vulnerability, the young teenagers were promised jobs in the construction industry. They were told they'd earn enough not only to look after themselves, but to also send cash home for their family.

One of Sambo's sons, Chann, who was 15 at the time, was convinced. He saw the offer of employment as a way to relieve the burden on his family, so he announced he was leaving. The work was incredibly hard; hot, manual labour. "I worked for six years without being paid any money. We were forced to work even when we were sick."

Each day Chann and his fellow workers, more fairly described as slaves, were forced to work up to 22 hours.

“EVERY 30 SECONDS A CHILD IS TAKEN – OFTEN FACING NOT ONLY UNIMAGINABLE BUT ALSO UNSPEAKABLE FATES.”

They slept together in small, hot, tin-roofed buildings, the size of a prison cell. Some didn't make it. “They died,” Chann said, “from heat and exhaustion.”

When Chann retold the story, the pain in Sambo's eyes was clear to see. It's hardly surprising. Sambo is Chann's dad. What father would not feel pain, remorse, a sense of failure when he hears his own son's account of such abuse – when he witnesses the scars, mental and physical, that remain?

With each trip I've made to areas significantly affected by trafficking, I've come to hate this vile crime more and more. I must have met 30 children and young people sold into slavery. I will never forget Roopa, the young woman who from the age of nine was raped up to 20 times a day by men in a dirty room, no bigger than a toilet cubicle, in one of Mumbai's brothels. Nor will I forget meeting six-year-old Meena, who was grabbed from outside her home by a trafficker in Nepal, or the mother of a child who was trafficked to work helping to produce basmati rice.

Each of these meetings has made me realise, just as we parents are united by our common feeling of love for our children, as consumers we are intrinsically linked with modern-day slavery. The food we eat, the hotels we stay in and the phones we use... The trade of people and our lives are interwoven. Given this connection, what responsibility do we have, and what can we do to deal with the international trade in people?

Human trafficking, I've come to realise, is not really *the* problem. Just as malnutrition, dirty water and malaria are not *the* problems. They're all symptoms. Symptoms of an underlying issue called poverty.

Traffickers target those living in extreme poverty. Those for whom an offer to take away a child to teach them a trade can sound like good news. And don't tell me you, if you were a parent seeing your child starve in front of you, might not be tempted too. When it feels like life or death, letting a child go can seem wise. Think of Moses' mother: knowing her baby was at risk of death from Egypt's ruler, she made careful plans to send him off into the unknown by placing him in a basket among the reeds along the River Nile. She was doing the best she could for him in incredibly difficult circumstances.



Sambo (pseudonym) church leader, and his son Chann (also pseudonym).



Tearfund's partner have trained people in various skills, including motorcycle repair. This young man is now running his own business in Cambodia.

What is trafficking?

■ Child trafficking is when 'any person under 18 [is] recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purpose of exploitation either within or outside a country'. (UNICEF)

■ Trafficking happens all over the world. A child is trafficked every 30 seconds.

■ Poverty drives people into the trap of traffickers. With little food to eat, people in desperate situations are easily tricked by offers of work with a good income.

■ Parents are often offered a large down payment with the promise of a life opportunity for their children.

■ To desperate families this looks like a route out of poverty. They do not know they are dealing with traffickers.

■ Children are trafficked into the sex trade, or can be sold to work in a factory or as a house servant, for no or very low pay. Far from home, they often have no idea where they are, no legal rights, poor living conditions, and no one to turn to for help.

What's more, if you don't deal with the underlying issue which causes trafficking, then rescuing and rehabilitating a young person such as Chann is pretty useless. For what do they return to, and how can you stop them from being the victim of a trafficker again?

At Tearfund, although we are committed to supporting our partners in rescue and rehabilitation work, our experience tells us that the very best thing we can do is stop children being trafficked in the first place. And that involves dealing first with the cause – poverty.

The way we do that is through local churches. In the world's poorest countries we're working with churches, helping them to make their communities better able to resist traffickers' lies by, among other things, →

What is Tearfund doing to help stop people being trafficked?

Tearfund's partners train families and help them to earn an income where they are, so that they have enough food to eat and are no longer dependent on the life promised by traffickers in order to survive.

Ways that we do this include:

- Helping people to understand the risk of trafficking and to see through the lies traffickers tell.
- Helping communities work together to be vigilant, share information about traffickers and challenge any who come to their village.
- Providing legal support to help families get justice and prosecute traffickers.
- Helping farmers to produce better crops through using best-practice and new techniques. With a more stable income their children are no longer vulnerable to trafficking.
- Helping people start self-help groups, where they can get together and save small amounts of money regularly. The group makes loans to members to enable them to set up small businesses. These help sustain their families during the agricultural low season so that hunger and poverty don't force them into the hands of the traffickers.
- Providing families with business starter-kits. These help them with materials and know-how to get their enterprises off the ground.



Jamie Fyfe/Tearfund

Sambo (pseudonym), church leader, and father of Chann (also pseudonym), with a frog reared on his farm. Sambo set up a successful frog farm with help from Tearfund's partner. Frog-rearing is one of the livelihood activities established to help people earn an income, so they don't need to move away to the city.

encouraging entrepreneurial skills to improve the family income.

Using local facilitators and the Bible, we start by helping churches to understand their call; to think through God-given resources and to consider who God says we are. Calling a meeting and leading Bible studies may not sound much, but their impact can be breathtaking.

Take Chann's community. His dad became a Christian, leading to a mindset change. We know that hearts and minds, including what people believe they are able to achieve, remain one of the greatest barriers to changing the fortunes of people living in poverty. Chann's father was able to engage with our local partner and as a result began to think through how he might be able to transform his own life.

To cut a long story short, he started thinking entrepreneurially – for him, that meant using his land for crops and creating a frog farm, breeding rather large croakers to serve a local food delicacy. So successful was his business, within months of starting it he was able not only to bring his sons home but also to pay for a tractor.

His story was not unique within his community. In just a few months, more than 20 families have also been able to transform their lives – all through the local church. Combating trafficking has not ended there: the church is, among other things, also raising awareness of the issue by warning parents about the risks of trafficking.

I've seen similar transformation elsewhere. Before the devastating earthquake, for example, I'd travelled to Nepal. I visited community after community and met family after family transformed through businesses that had begun through local churches.

Get Baking

Our supporters proved their love of baking last year by raising £50,000 through our Big Bake. If you missed the fun, now's the time to whip up a batch of brownies and get stuck in: you can help us beat last year's total.

Once again, we have resources to help you set up a Big Bake sale at your workplace, church, home group or other social setting.

Or feed that competitive gene by holding a Big Bake tournament: Invite your friends to join in for a donation of £5 (or more).

James Clee was the winner of Tearfund's staff baking tournament and one of his signature bakes is chocolate and honeycomb cupcakes.

"I never expected to win," said James. "Before I entered the competition I'd only really mastered banana bread. The tournament challenged me to try out lots of new recipes and I got to meet people at Tearfund who I'd never talked to before.

Cake can open lots of doors for you." As well as being increasingly popular with his friends and colleagues, James is in demand as the family baker: "I made monkey-face cakes for my niece's first birthday, and a truck cake when my nephew was three," he said.

"Seeing the smiles on their faces was brilliant." Follow this link for more, and to get James' cupcake recipe: tearfund.org/baking



James Clee's chocolate and honeycomb cupcakes

"WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STAND WITH THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH AND SAY 'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.'"

Again, the church was also raising awareness of the issue – among other places, in communities on the Indian border, where many victims of trafficking pass through. The first child I met there was Meena. Aged six, she'd been playing outside her home when a stranger came and grabbed her and dragged her away.

She was taken to a border town, where one of our partners had trained the local church in watching out for the victims of trafficking. Meena was spotted in distress. She and the man she was with were approached. He ran away; Meena was kept safe.

All these stories show what can happen when the local church is mobilised – when it stands in the gap between the trafficker and their would-be victim. And this is where again our lives get to be intertwined with the story of modern-day slavery.

We have the opportunity to stand with the worldwide Church and say "enough is enough". To help give choices to parents, who like us are hardwired to do all they can for their kids. To be part of a generation that brings an end to this evil trade. When I show a picture of my boy to parents overseas, I want to know they can proudly show off their children to me in return; that their offspring will be present, not absent. Will you join us in this work, by supporting our No Child Taken campaign? ■



What can you do to support No Child Taken?

Tearfund wants to stop trafficking in its tracks. The Church is a worldwide voluntary network and it can go head-to-head with trafficking. You can help by supporting our No Child Taken campaign:

Visit our website: tearfund.org/nochild for more information.

Pray: Use your voice to intercede and let God capture your heart with his love for children at risk.

Share: Join in God's life-changing work by making a financial gift.

Church: Get your church involved by asking them to use our free resources.

Bake: Last year our Big Bake raised a show-stopping £50,000. Time to roll up your sleeves. More information in the box below.

Tweet: Talk about your response to No Child Taken using #nochildtaken.

Twibbon: Add a No Child Taken twibbon to your Twitter photo: twibbon.com/support/no-child-taken

JUSTYN REES LARCOMBE

TAILS I LOSE



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OUT
NOW

THE CITY HIGH-FLIER WHO LOST EVERYTHING TO GAMBLING



Justyn Rees Larcombe had everything. A high-flying city job, a big house, a Porsche, a Mercedes. He had a beautiful wife and three sons.

He lost it all, blowing £750,000 in three years. Having depleted all of his own money, maxed his credit cards, and pawned priceless family heirlooms, he turned to his wife's savings and his corporate credit card to fund his habit.

His addiction cost him his job, his wife, children, home and reputation. He barely escaped criminal prosecution, and considered suicide.

But this is a story of hope. Justyn stopped gambling. Today he is rebuilding his life and speaks widely about the dangers of gambling.



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Open Doors – 60 Years On and Still Smuggling

Imagine not being able to meet with your mates, not being able to visit your local park or café with them for fear of drawing attention to yourselves. Imagine having to meet in secret, in the dark, reading by candlelight in case harsh electric light gives you away. Imagine having to memorise phone numbers, in case the police confiscate your mobile.

That is what life is like for millions of Christians around the world. In many countries, Christianity is forbidden and freedom of religious belief simply does not exist. Being found with a Bible can lead to imprisonment or execution, and being a Christian is literally a matter of life and death. In these places, the Church has been forced underground – to become secret.

For 60 years, Open Doors has been helping persecuted Christians around the world. In 1955 a young man called Andrew went behind the Iron Curtain to discover hidden believers in communist Europe. Very few of the Christians in these places had Bibles, so Brother Andrew, as he became known, started smuggling copies across the border. He was running a huge risk: his car – a blue VW

Beetle – drew a lot of attention in lands where Soviet cars were generally the only ones on the road. Gradually others joined him. Today the organisation he founded, Open Doors, supports persecuted Christians in over 50 countries around the globe.

From drugs to Bibles

Bible-smuggling remains a core part of Open Doors' work. Last year, millions of Bibles in many languages and forms were smuggled to dozens of countries.

Take Pablo,* in Colombia. As a teenager, Pablo did a different kind of smuggling: he drove a truck around Colombia, smuggling cocaine and delivering propaganda for FARC, the communist guerrilla army.

“BEING FOUND WITH A BIBLE CAN LEAD TO IMPRISONMENT OR EXECUTION, AND BEING A CHRISTIAN IS LITERALLY A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH.”



Then he was captured by enemies of FARC. To save his own life, he told them everything he knew. Pablo escaped, but he was now on the run.

In this hour of need, he met some Christians who told him about the hope he could find in Jesus. Pablo realised that God had spared his life for a purpose. Pablo gave his life to Christ and promised to serve him.

How, though? The answer came through a pastor who was also an Open Doors volunteer. He encouraged Pablo to take up smuggling again – not smuggling drugs, but Bibles. Since then, ‘Brother Pablo’ has worked with Open Doors, taking shipments of Bibles into the most hazardous regions of Colombia.

It is dangerous work. The gospel message he delivers stands in stark opposition to the violent political doctrines of the guerrilla leaders. For them, Christians are enemies, pastors are military targets, and the Bible is a lethal weapon. There is a price on Pablo’s head, and several times he has had to go into hiding.

But he remains undaunted. “God wants fighters to know and accept him,” he says. “For that I was called – to bring the Good News to people who need the light of the Word.”

As Eddie Lyle of Open Doors says: “We are hiding hope, smuggling it into countries in suitcases, in clothing, in the backs of vans and in other ways I can’t talk about. Many of these places are where the Bible is banned or burned. Places like North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the Maldives and Yemen. Yet these places are where the Church continues to grow and the Bible continues to be read. Our smugglers continue to get their cargo through.”

Danger in Korea

Last year alone, Open Doors distributed 3.1 million Bibles and Christian resources. These are often smuggled across borders into North Korea, Afghanistan and other countries where such things are prohibited or difficult to obtain. In North Korea alone, Open Doors distributed over 21,000 Bibles and pieces of literature (usually smuggled) and also increased special radio programmes for secret believers.

Han-Mei,* is a North Korean Christian. One night he was so engrossed in reading his Bible that at first he didn’t hear the knocking at the door. It became a loud thumping. Hurriedly, he hid his Bible and opened the door. Three members of the security forces burst in, demanding to search the house. To his horror, Han-Mei saw one of the men go straight to where his Bible was and pull it out of its secret place. He thought he was going to be killed, but the man just hid the Bible in his own clothes and said to his colleagues, “There’s nothing here.” The three men left. But then the man who took the Bible returned, alone. “Because of the current situation I’m keeping my faith to myself,” he said. “But God the Father guided me to your house yesterday and gave me this opportunity. I’m so grateful for it. I have brought your Bible back.”

Feeding people with hope

Open Doors is about more than Bibles. They train and equip Christians to face persecution and attack. Their staff work with local churches and partner organisations to provide, food, shelter, medical care and trauma care for victims of persecution. They help persecuted communities become self-sufficient through drilling wells. They offer microloans to help Christians forced out of business or jobs to build a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

The most urgent need at the moment is in the Middle East. Open Doors supports some 10,000 families in Iraq. There, families who have been driven out of their homes by Islamic State (IS) are trying to rebuild their lives, to build a future for their children, or even trace loved ones who have been taken captive. →



1 Million Bibles in One Night

To a casual observer it was just another tugboat, lumbering along at the sleepy speed of three knots, towing a barge in its wake. But the tugboat *Michael* held a secret. The barge behind it was a specially designed semi-submersible smuggling rig. And it was loaded with 1 million Chinese Bibles in 232 waterproof wrapped one-ton packages. It was 1981, and this was Project Pearl, the night when Open Doors delivered 1 million Bibles to Chinese Christians in one night.

One of those on board was Paul Esterbrooks. “By nine o’clock on that historic night,” he recalls, “our tugboat was weaving through a maze of anchored Chinese navy ships in the darkness near the southern port city of Shantou. Thousands of local Chinese Christians waited patiently in the dark on the appointed beach.

“We towed the off-loaded floating packages to shore using three small rubber boats. Chinese believers came out in the water – some up to their neck. They pulled the blocks onto the beach and cut them open.” The individual boxes of Bibles were then passed up the sand to the tree-line of the cove. The Chinese believers promised to circulate the Bibles throughout the country. “In some cases, that process took as many as five years and a number of Chinese Christians paid dearly for it,” says Esterbrooks.

Some of the boxes were discovered by the Chinese police, who threw them into the sea. “The next morning, fishermen plucked these floating volumes out of the sea and put them on the roofs of their homes to dry. Later they sold them to Christians in the area.”

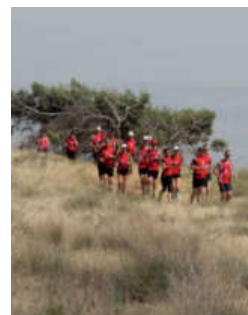
Peter Xu, the leader of the Born-Again Movement – the largest house church network in China – told of his networks’ experience.

“One month the three men were discovered with their Bible-load by the local police. The police threw the 1,000 Project Pearl Bibles into the cesspool of the public latrine and the three men were interrogated and jailed for the weekend.

“Monday they were released and commanded to return straight home and never return. Instead they waited inside the latrine until darkness fell. Then they climbed down into the filthy cesspool of human waste, carefully retrieving each of the foul-smelling books. They washed them off under the local water tap and carried them home. There they dried them out, sprayed them with perfume and circulated them through the network. Such was the hunger and importance of every copy of God’s Word.”

Maldives: Tourist’s Dream, Christian’s Nightmare

Fancy a holiday? Why not try the Maldives – calm and tranquillity, restful and relaxing times on white sandy beaches with turquoise water lapping at your toes. Well, for Christians, it’s a totally different story. Christianity is illegal in the 1,200 islands that make up the Maldives. Islam is the state religion; it is illegal to follow any other religion and even tourists can be in a lot of trouble if they are caught with a Bible. Restrictions are imposed as well on working migrants and expatriates, who are never allowed to share Christ upfront; even those who do it with utmost subtlety are punished with outright deportation when discovered.



Open Doors needs some strong men

In our 60th year, we’re asking as many people as we can to do a Muskathlon for us – an extreme challenge in an extreme location for extreme persecution. See the work of Open Doors and also complete a gruelling walk, run or mountain bike course in difficult terrain. The next one is in Jordan and Egypt in May 2016.



“MARTIN KNOWS THE PATH HE IS CHOOSING TO FOLLOW IS DANGEROUS – BUT THIS HASN’T STOPPED HIM.”

Open Doors works with church leaders like Martin. Martin is a refugee himself: he left the village of Karamles, near Mosul, when it was overrun by IS. He and many others from his village found refuge in Erbil, in Kurdistan-controlled Iraq. Despite being just 24, he now helps to look after hundreds of families from his village, all living in exile. He oversees the distribution of the food Open Doors provides through local partners, as well as providing pastoral care.

The bishop who encouraged Martin to become a leader in the church was among the many clergymen killed in Iraq for their faith. Martin knows the path he is choosing to follow is dangerous – but this hasn’t stopped him. In moments of doubt, he says that he imagines that Jesus is standing with him. “I remember that I am called to serve as he has served.”

Open Doors has just launched a £10m appeal worldwide to support these families for another year. If you want to help, go to opendoorsuk.org.

Sixty years on, the issue of persecuted Christians has not gone away. Communism has crumbled, but in its place, militant Islam is threatening to wipe Christianity from the Middle East. There are many challenges, but with the help of its supporters around the world, Open Doors remains committed to supporting the right of individuals to worship freely and openly. Throughout the world, the organisation dedicates itself to supporting Christians to remain in the places where faith costs the most.

There were originally 800 Christian families in Martin’s village. Around 250 of them have left Iraq – and Martin could do the same. But he remains devoted to the people of Karamles. “How can I leave them in this time of crisis?” he asks. “I have decided to follow my calling and stay in Iraq, with them ... I am needed here at this moment to feed my people with hope.” ■

**Names are changed to protect identities.*

Where is life worst as a Christian? Is there hope?

North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan are the five most difficult places to simply exist as a Christian. In many of those places, anyone caught owning or reading a Bible faces extreme punishment or retribution. Yet despite extreme persecution, the Church is growing in some of the most unlikely places, like Iran. Almost all Christian activity here is illegal, yet the number of young Muslims following Christ is growing – 40 years ago there were 200 Christians from Muslim backgrounds in Iran, today there are more than 370,000.



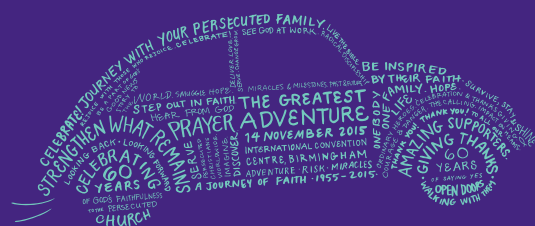
Why not travel with us and see what we do? Help us with our work

Each year Open Doors organises trips for supporters. Some are to see our work and meet people that our supporters have fundraised for. Others are to smuggle Bibles and resources into areas of need.

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Fadi and Linda are refugees camping inside a church in Erbil, Iraq – relying on Open Doors for their basic needs.

They fled the Islamic State invasion of Mosul leaving their home and all their possessions. A year later they are still

refugees. Two children from just one of nearly 24,000 families Open Doors will be feeding in Iraq and Syria this winter.

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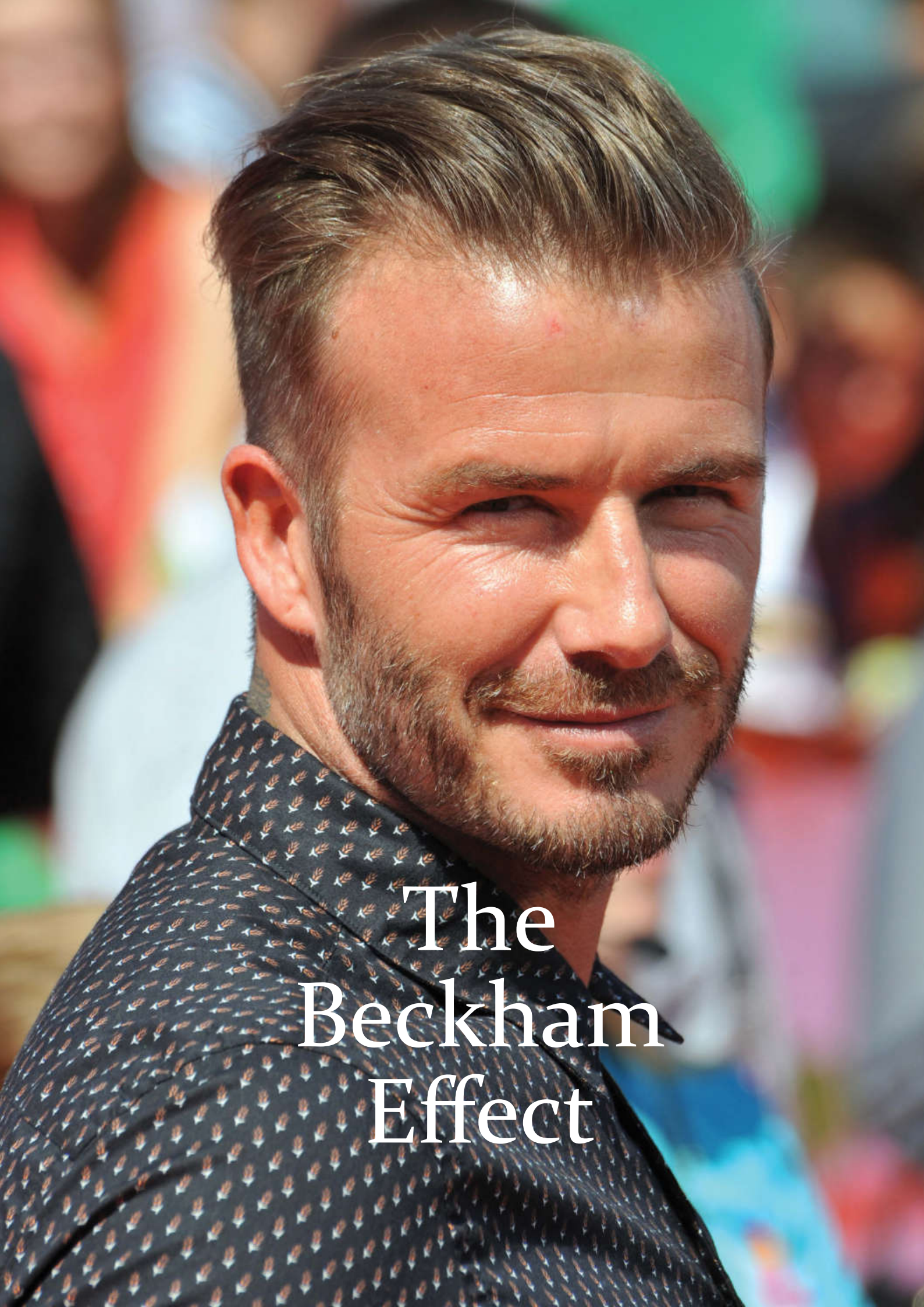
£71 can provide an emergency food parcel to feed a family of five for a month.

To make a gift phone **01993 460015**
or visit www.opendoorsuk.org/emergency



OpenDoors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians



The Beckham Effect



Football superstar, half of a celebrity power couple and one of the most influential and recognisable faces on the planet: at 40 years old, David Beckham is enjoying an incredibly blessed life. But what part has religion and spirituality played in his world-conquering success? *Sorted* investigates Brand Beckham's beliefs.

BY SHAUN CURRAN

It is impossible not to consider David Beckham's extraordinary life and conclude that he's the man who has it all. Over two decades in the public eye as elite sportsman, fashion icon, entrepreneur and celebrity influencer, he is a global icon and rare breed of superstar; not only recognisable from Macclesfield to Mumbai, but also with the distinction of having both such disparate luminaries as Prince William and Tom Cruise on his speed dial.

Professionally, he has attained a status bestowed on very few footballers. With Manchester United, his childhood club and the one with who he made his name as part of the Class of 92 youth team, he lived out his dreams, winning six Premier League titles, two FA Cups and one Champions League as part of the club's historic treble in 1999. He played for England 115 times – 59 as captain – which is a record for an outfield player. In 2003, the year he signed for the Galácticos of Real Madrid (with whom he would win another domestic title) he was awarded an OBE for services to football. It wasn't just in this country he was appreciated – he was twice voted runner-up in the FIFA World Player of the Year award in 1999 and 2001, while his high-profile, multi-million dollar 2007 move to LA Galaxy in the MLS in America ended with him as popular on that side of the Atlantic as this one. Naturally for someone whose success followed him around, another league winner's medal was added to his collection there too.

Personally, his marriage to Victoria Beckham, the former Spice Girl whose nickname in the all-conquering, record-breaking girl group handed the couple the distinctive and endearing moniker Posh and Becks, elevated his fame above that of mere sports superstar. Beckham has stated variously over the years that his priority has been to "a strong family man, a

strong husband and a strong father", and with four children he dotes on – Brooklyn, 16, Romeo, 13, Cruz, ten and Harper, four – he remains true to his pledge.

Inevitably, though, the Beckham family is one of the most publicised and discussed in the world, and the increased commercial revenues available to him as a result are staggering. For just one example, during the first season he was in MLS, LA Galaxy sold 300,000 replica jerseys bearing Beckham's name – more than any other sportsperson in the entirety of American sport that year.

Together, their celebrity has helped him and Victoria create a money-making machine that has transcended their respective professions – David is retired, while Victoria has long since stopped making records – to amass a fortune in excess of £210m. While she has created a successful fashion line, he has made the most of his handsome good looks and sense of style to cash in on lucrative modelling deals and endorsement contracts. With a lifetime deal with Adidas worth over around £100m, signed in his playing days, already in the bag, Beckham has variously been the face of such luxury brands as Armani and Breitling, technology giants Samsung and EA Sports, billboard underwear model for H&M (earning him £7.5m and an incalculable number of gawping looks) and, latterly, a deal with Hong Kong-based fashion empire Global Brands, home to Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger among others, to follow in Victoria's footsteps and design his own clothing line.

Brand Beckham, indeed, and it's not for nothing that Victoria nicknamed him "Goldenballs"; extending the →

"HE HAS ATTAINED A STATUS BESTOWED ON VERY FEW FOOTBALLERS."



Glyn Thomas/REX Shutterstock

metaphorical moniker past the sidelines of a football pitch, whatever Beckham touches invariably turns to gold.

But exactly how did this working-class boy from London – who by his own admission couldn't even spell the word 'professional' when writing about his ambition to be a footballer on a school careers form – achieve so much? And what exact role, if any, have his religious and spiritual beliefs aided him along the way?

The first question is much easier to answer than the second. In football circles, it is well known that Beckham practised himself into brilliance, maximising every ounce of his potential through sheer graft. "I never do anything half-heartedly. I will continue to work hard and play hard and do everything I can to be successful, whatever I do. I want to be the best. I think it's a good way to be," Beckham said upon retiring from football, and anybody who ever watched Beckham's unflinching commitment on the pitch, as well as his unswerving dedication to maintaining his cultivated image off it, will know that statement to be true. Few have worked as hard as Beckham for their lot.

But the question of Beckham's faith is much more difficult to define. He was born on 2 May 1975 in Leytonstone to his mother Sandra Georgina, a hairdresser, and his father David Edward Alan 'Ted' Beckham, a kitchen fitter. While he may not have had an overtly religious upbringing – he insists that was the case – one of Beckham's grandfathers, Joseph West, was Jewish, and Beckham once stated that: "I've probably had more contact with Judaism than with any other religion. I used to wear the traditional Jewish skullcaps when I was younger, and I also went along to some Jewish weddings with my grandfather."

Yet that contradicts Beckham's previous claims to have attended church regularly as a child – although he never specifically mentioned a denomination – which suggests that Beckham has never had a strong religious conviction. He once famously said that "he wanted his children baptised, although I'm not sure into what religion", so it is safe to assume there might be some confusion as to where his views lie, if they exist at all. He is, however, adamant that his good friend Tom Cruise has never tried to convert

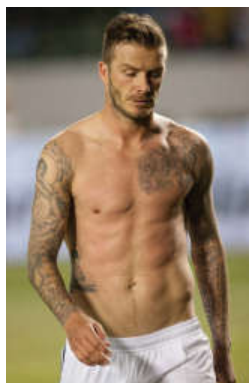
"DURING THE FIRST SEASON HE WAS IN MLS, LA GALAXY SOLD 300,000 REPLICAS OF BECKHAM'S JERSEY BEARING BECKHAM'S NAME."

him to the church of Scientology. "No he hasn't, that isn't true," he said in an interview last year.

As befits someone who has spent fortunes on media training, his savviness in interviews means he reveals as much or as little as he sees fit, so it is little wonder people have read so much into the religious imagery present on a number of his many tattoos. Body ink is often a form of outwardly expressing beliefs and values, be that religious, cultural or otherwise, so naturally people have wondered how much Beckham has considered his own artwork. One tattooed Chinese motif translated reads as: "Death and life have determined appointments. Riches and honour depend upon heaven." Another, depicting Jesus thinking about his death on the cross reads: 'The Man of Sorrows'. Other religious-themed tattoos include a crucifix, a guardian angel watching over the names of his children and Jesus being raised from the tomb surrounded by cherubs that represent his children. He has tatted a verse from the Bible's Song of Songs in Hebrew.

So does his extensive tattoo collection indicate a belief in God? Not necessarily, as he once said: "People look at my tattoos and the majority of them are religious images so people think, 'Oh, he must be very religious.' I respect all religions but I'm not a deeply religious person. But I try and live life in the right way, respecting other people. I wasn't brought up in a religious way but I believe there's something out there that looks after you."

Instead of worshipping a specific higher being, it appears that Beckham has taken his lead from religious teachings. He says that such virtues were instilled in him from a young age by his parents and grandparents, virtues that he himself has instilled into his children as they grow up in the most public of circumstances. He once commented: "My parents were always very strict and they gave me the right beliefs in how to treat people."





It was very strict and all about morals – I try to pass that on to my own children. I was asked what advice I give my boys about women, and I tell them my granddad used to say ‘you treat everyone with respect, you behave like a gentleman, especially to women, and I think women appreciate that’. I always say that to my boys.”

It is this desire to lead his life in the right way which helped Beckham on the path to being a devout family man. It is clear from many of his public declarations – and again, his tattoos – that he adores his wife and children, and that they remain the cornerstone of his existence. Once invited to describe Victoria to someone who’s never met her, he said: “She’s charming, she’s funny, she’s immensely talented, first with being a Spice Girl and especially now with being a designer. She’s a very committed person. When she wants something she knows what to do to get it.” Yet he pointedly added: “And she’s an amazing mum. That’s her strongest quality for me. Being her husband and the father of her children, there’s nothing better than seeing a woman who is amazing with her children.”

The sanctity of marriage is one Christian belief that Beckham holds true, and the notion that love is an eternal commitment. “We’ve been married for 17 years, it’s an amazing part of our life and we’ve created something with our children, our family, that’s very special, we’ve got four amazing kids,” he said. Those children remain his priority, although he recognises the importance of maintaining a loving relationship with his wife.

He once said: “Dates for Victoria and I are very few and far between – we have four kids so the majority of our time is spent with them and working, but when we do have date night, we don’t need to impress each other too much anymore. It’s always important to spend time with your partner, but the time that you spend with them, you could just go for a walk through the park, just go for dinner. Those moments you spend together are special. When you show each other attention, you need that.”

Yet it tells you all about his commitment to matrimony that Beckham says the most romantic thing he ever did for Victoria was arranging to renew their wedding vows. He said: “It was a whole surprise, Victoria knew nothing



“HE PLAYED FOR ENGLAND 115 TIMES – 59 AS CAPTAIN – WHICH IS A RECORD FOR AN OUTFIELD PLAYER.”

about it. I had it all organised. I told her we were going out for lunch and I packed her bag. I had a dress ready for her to change into on the plane.”

It is to Beckham’s credit that he seeks to live in the correct way when his life is so abnormal to most people’s perceptions. But despite his overwhelming levels of notoriety, and the riches he has amassed, Beckham’s only wish is to be remembered not for the fame or fortune, but for the skills that catapulted him into the life he now leads.

“I just want to be remembered as a hard-working footballer,” he said last year. “I want to be remembered firstly as a good and successful footballer because that’s what I’ve done for many years. And then who knows after that?”

Who knows indeed, and when it comes to Beckham’s true religious views, they remain a mystery until he decides to set the record straight once and for all. ■



BUSINESS

CHARLES HUMPHREYS

We're in Business

Empty Success Syndrome



“WE ALL COME ALIVE WHEN WE’RE DOING WHAT TICKS OUR BOX: AN ENGINEERING JOB INSTEAD OF Y, WORKING AS A CHEF IN A RESTAURANT INSTEAD OF Z.”

I’m guessing that most of us want to feel passionate about what we do for a career, and to be able to say that in some small way what we do contributes to the greater good. Harold Whitman said: “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

There’s no doubt that we all come alive when we’re doing what ticks our box: an engineering job instead of Y, working as a chef in a restaurant instead of Z. However, after experiencing some less-than-successful business ventures over the years, I’ve finally begun to realise that I have been asking the wrong question. Instead of trying to understand what I’m supposed to be doing with my life, I have learned the need to recognise who I’m supposed to be. As a consequence of grasping this, I have begun to recognise what I’m to do with my life and, more importantly, how to achieve it.

During Jesus’ time on earth, his ministry didn’t appear to be that successful. Despite his miracles, many people continued to doubt him, his 12 elect followers argued

among themselves, were slow on the uptake, and included one who would eventually betray him to a most shameful death on a cross. Despite all this opposition, Jesus always worked from a place of sonship, declaring, in John 5:19, that he only did what he saw his Father do. Everything he did flowed directly out of his relationship with his heavenly Dad.

Today we are invited to hang out all the time, like Jesus did, in the presence of the Father. Once we remain there, and gain in closeness to him day by day, he will begin to tell us what we should be doing. Start by committing five minutes on your own each day with some quietness and a Bible verse, then persevere and see what happens.

Are you looking for a change in career? Despite having had a successful career, are you still looking for happiness? If so, you could be suffering from Empty Success Syndrome. You could be among those who feel that something’s missing and don’t know how to reply to the question: *What do you want from your life?* If this is you, which category do you fall into?

The unfulfilled dreamer – You never gave time to those dreams, but now you’re looking back and wondering...

1 The discouraged dreamer – Despite fulfilling your dreams, you’re still feeling empty.

2 The ambitious dreamer – You’ve achieved your dreams and you’re now thinking, what next? Is there something new and fresh and long-lasting?

A (vain) way to tackle the Empty Success Syndrome is to throw yourself into your work or a new job in the hope you might discover something at the bottom of the cup, along with the bits of soggy biscuit. You could also put what you’re feeling down to a mid-life crisis, or blame it on your wife and family. However, *none* of this will give the solution for which you’re seeking and yearning.

The solution won’t lie in self-help strategies, either. Instead, look to Jesus for your answer and the example he gave us of getting into our heavenly Father’s presence. Once there, you will discover you are a beloved son. When you know you’re loved unconditionally, you will repeat Jesus’ words: “I only do what I hear the Father telling me to do.” Get to recognise that inner quiet voice, and also learn to listen to the Father speaking through the people you meet and the places where you find yourself. ■

Charles is an experienced careers coach and founder of a Christian-based careers coaching service called Want 2 get on? that offers careers coaching, workshops and seminars at want2geton.co.uk. He is author of *The Christian Guide to Jobs and Careers*. He is also a busy dad of three young boys, husband to an overworked doctor and leads the men’s ministry at Oasis Church in Colliers Wood, SW19.

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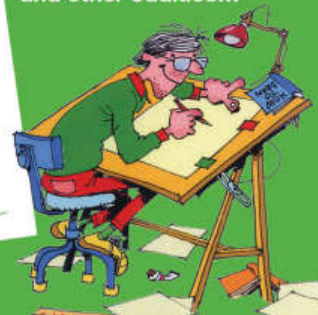
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Managing Your Boss

Eighty per cent of people don't leave their job, they leave their boss. So how do you manage your boss to ensure you develop your career by staying in your job rather than moving on? Here are a couple of top tips.



Contribute to your boss' success

Being a line manager is a challenging role and one which can be under-supported, so why don't you make it your job to support them? Take it upon yourself to understand the big picture of what your boss wants to achieve, and then go above and beyond the call of duty to help them. Start by simply going the extra mile in your own work to achieve *your* targets, and then turn to your colleagues and consider how you

can help them achieve *their* targets. If all goes to plan, you'll find yourself in a position where your boss feels they can't do without you.

Watch out for people who are insecure, who may feel threatened by you. There may be some office politics as others may see themselves in the role you are creating for yourself and don't take kindly to you stepping up. Manage all this with care.



Make your boss look great

The Prime Minister (not our current one) stood to address the crowd who had gathered for the special event in the reception rooms at 10 Downing Street. I had been thanked by a special adviser just beforehand for suggesting the idea for the event. What I didn't expect was what came next. The Prime Minister began his speech by welcoming his guests and then recognising the person who had suggested the idea for the event. Then he turned to a government minister and thanked him. You could have knocked me over with a feather. That's politics for you. Then I recollected the words, 'It's amazing what you can achieve if you don't mind who gets the credit.'

If you can make your boss look great, who cares if you don't get the credit? So, starting today, go out of your way to ensure that your boss gets the credit for the team's work; after all, they are the team leader and stuff wouldn't be achieved without them. So ensure your boss gets recognised in front of the team, their boss, and your customers and clients.

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Living a Skyscraper Life



corruption within FIFA... the list goes on.

It's easy and extremely tempting to jump on the bandwagon and condemn the 'deviants' for their actions, but before we join the rock-throwing we might first want to reflect on just how 'normalised' these tendencies are. Rounding up your business mileage is a long way from claiming for a duck house. Paying a tradesman cash-in-hand is a long way from holding a 'tax-efficient' offshore trust fund. But once you've set off down the path, where do you draw the line? At what point does the behaviour flip from being normal to deviant? This question became a whole lot more challenging for me when I became a boss and then a dad. How can I tell my team to follow the rules if I bypass 'obstructive' company procedures? How can I promote respect and fairness if I gossip and criticise others behind their back? How can I tell my kids to obey the law but park on double-yellows because we're only going to be a minute? And how can I teach my kids about healthy, loving, affirming relationships but have a copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey* lying around the house?

Viewed from this perspective, avoiding normalisation of deviance looks impossible, the bar is simply set too high. Like gravity it's always going to pull us down, isn't it? Maybe when tempted to normalise deviance we should, to quote Stephen Fry, just 'give in straight away, to save on the faffing about'.

Personally, I think we're better than that. Humankind can resist gravity, when we deliberately choose to. November 3rd marks one year since New York's iconic One World Trade Centre, the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere, opened. Deep foundations and a strong central core allow 'Freedom Tower' to stand tall above Manhattan, overcoming gravity and withstanding all manner of natural and man-made attacks.

Similarly, deep foundational values and strong core beliefs are essential for anyone who wants to live an iconic skyscraper life, resisting the gravitational pull of normalisation of deviance. ■



“LANCE ARMSTRONG SOUGHT TO JUSTIFY HIS ILLEGAL DRUG USE ON THE BASIS THAT ‘EVERYONE ELSE WAS DOING IT’.”

What links Lance Armstrong, MPs, the credit crunch and NASA? Answer: Normalisation of deviance. Put simply, normalisation of deviance describes the situation where, having let your standards or behaviours slip below that which would ordinarily be deemed acceptable, but having had nothing bad happen – indeed finding that the outcome was actually favourable and/or pleasurable – that behaviour becomes your new 'normal'. NASA let their technical performance

standards slip in order to maintain their launch schedule, leading to two separate but, at their heart, related disasters. Lending money to customers who could never hope to pay it back delivered massive profits for the banks, until someone realised that the emperor wasn't wearing any clothes. Making excessive and in some cases fraudulent expense claims became 'normal' for many MPs. Lance Armstrong sought to justify his illegal drug use on the basis that "everyone else was doing it". Ashley Madison's 1.2m UK customers, tax avoidance schemes for the rich and famous, alleged bribery and

Martin is an experienced leadership coach, consultant and facilitator. He helps individuals, groups and organisations to make a bigger difference in the world by equipping them to be bolder in their actions and conversations as well as helping them shift the boulders that sometimes get in the way. Martin lives in the West Midlands with his wife and three children. You can contact him at martin@martincarterassociates.com.

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Capitalising on Cultural Differences

Solidarity among culturally split communities

Y our organisation needs constant teamwork for optimal productivity. For a long time, teamwork has brought about collective successes in a broad range of tasks, from project execution and goal achievement to managerial functions. In this increasingly globalised world, one challenge is omnipresent: cultural diversity. How do you bridge cultural gaps between team members of different backgrounds, and utilise this diversity to improve organisational performance?

Cultural diversity may cause a dilemma in your organisation. When you unite people from various ethnic backgrounds for a common purpose, it is possible to foster a feeling of unity. On the other hand, you can divide your employees according to their cultural backgrounds to maximise team synergy. In this article, we begin to explore answers to the question, "How can you instil respect for cultural diversity in the workplace and use it to benefit your organisation?"

Why it is important to shun ethnocentricity?

Ethnocentricity, the act of viewing other cultures as inferior to your own, is unacceptable in the workplace unless you want a fight on your hands. While it is natural for human beings to compare and contrast various cultural practices to their own, viewing your colleagues through your biased cultural lenses may lead to misjudgement. To nurture exceptional teamwork, encourage your team members to focus on their colleagues' skills and strengths



"HOW CAN YOU INSTIL RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE?"

rather than judging them by their cultural practices.

Here are a few tips on how to achieve efficiency with cultural sensitivity in mind. They are exceedingly useful for your organisation, particularly when you get an assignment in a foreign country.

- Research and learn basic concepts of the culture of the team, of which you will be a part. Learn to speak a few sentences in their language. This is a significant step towards building a bridge with culturally diverse people.
- Have a personal aide, preferably a colleague in the organisation, who is familiar with the culture, to guide you in your cultural immersion process. This way, you can understand the culture from a first-hand perspective, rather than through the theory.
- Listen more and talk less. When you prioritise listening to the ideas of others and suppress your

need to speak from time to time, you can learn faster from the perspective of the spectator and student. In turn, this will help you avoid semantic misunderstandings.

- Learn from mistakes. Never see them as failures, but lessons from which you can derive more ideas to hone your cultural sensitivity.
- Develop your flexibility. Be versatile and open to change. It is important that you update your people management skills continually, to suit the needs of your foreign co-workers.

Combine the positive traits, from both the new culture and your own, while placing emphasis on your culturally derived skills. If you continue to do this while immersed in a new culture, you will soon feel at home in your new surroundings. Develop your cultural diversity skills today.

To learn more visit managerialconflict.com ■

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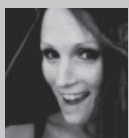
SMART TALK

With Dr Richard Scott, Jojo Meadows and Gerald Coates

OUR EXPERTS



Richard Scott has worked as a surgeon, GP and evangelist in England, India and parts of Africa. His wife, Heather is also a doctor and the couple have three daughters. Sport is a passion for Richard, interspersed more recently with writing, which developed during treatment for bowel cancer.



Jojo Meadows is passionate about spreading God's word in an original way. She trained as a counsellor and helped to run a crisis centre in Solihull before being headhunted by Connexions to develop courses for senior schools. Jojo has been through many life-changing experiences including anorexia, teenage pregnancy, rape and cervical cancer. This motivated her to help others who are struggling through difficult circumstances.



Gerald Coates founded the Pioneer network of churches and is married to Anona. The couple live in Leatherhead, Surrey and have three sons. Gerald is a speaker, author and broadcaster. His latest book is called *Sexual Healing* and is for men struggling with pornography.

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Heartbreak and Grief

I am broken. My partner died after a six-year marriage. We had so many plans, dreams and goals to achieve. I decided to wait before having children, and now it's too late. How am I ever going to get over this grief of losing her, let alone the regret I carry of not having children with her? She so desperately wanted them. I can't live with the guilt. What should I do?

GC Grief can be a God-given way of dealing with loss and confusion. Take your time; she would have wanted you to reflect, give thanks for the time you had together and to ask for grace and patience as you recall many happy memories. And maybe, waiting before having children need not be the cause of further distress. To have lost a mother at such an early age could be demanding in so many ways, for them and you. Time doesn't heal, but you will reflect and realise you cannot change what has happened. It wasn't your fault. Grieve well; you do not have to pretend. You

deserve this and so do the people who over the next few years will come into your important life.

RS I am so sorry. Nothing can replace her and the children you could have shared. But our decisions are made without being party to future events. So while guilt may be considered "natural", it is being highly unfair on yourself. It is also destructive, which is why our enemy, who delights in our unhappiness, sprinkles it so liberally. In faith, we can confidently expect God to forgive our sins, our mistakes. Talk to Him, for He longs for the best for you. In time, the good memories won't fade, but allow Him to take away the bad stuff so you can move on, always loving her but not hating yourself.

JM Guilt is a natural process to work through loss, and within the reflection of the situation, regrets will *always* be included. But as harsh as this sounds, it is life. There is nothing more certain in life than death. I too lost a fiancée who died completely out of the blue and I harboured regrets and carried guilt. I can assure you, though, that



time is a healer. If you forgive yourself and understand that your time was not right to have children, as they too would be suffering a loss, the reality and guilt will become relative. I am so sorry for your loss, and if you need any further help I suggest you source a bereavement counsellor in your area.

I've been diagnosed with a rare condition and I've been told that due to this condition I may be infertile. I'm wounded. My wife is desperate to have a baby. I don't want to adopt as I don't want anyone else's kid, but what I'm struggling with is feeling less of a man and now I'm going to lose my wife because of it. Why is God allowing this?

GC If, for whatever reason, you are infertile, your wife will understand that this is not self-inflicted. Suffering and loss is a part of life in our fallen world, of which we are a part. None of us can escape. But God is with us through it all; even he had to suffer the loss of his Son to give us a fresh start, renewed hope and eternal life. Tell your



wife what you feel, emphasise your love for her, and slowly begin to plan a path for you both. God allows us so much freedom in both gain and loss, and we are all caught

up in a battle. God and His goodness is not the only force in our world. You will be given grace and strength to fight back and not be overcome.

You have probably had this written in to you several times, but please help me.

My mother-in-law is interfering, lying, conniving and last, but not least, a fire-breathing dragon. My wife and her mother are so close, but behind my wife's back the dragon scowls at me so much that I have to hide in the toilet in fear of being melted. She lies, causing arguments between my wife and me. I want to move forward in embracing her. How can I achieve this?

GC You must be honest with your wife – you married her, not the mother. If she is destroying your marriage, then you need to take steps to forgive, move on, and dream for a life together. While we want to honour our parents, wherever possible, if she is causing the damage you express, you both need to see a counsellor, so that there is not all-out war between the two of you. For the sake of your family, this must be done.

RS Eek. This needs tackling, rather than avoiding. Firstly, your wife needs to realise where her primary loyalty now lies – supporting you, rather than taking her mother's side, so meet with her first. Next, as a couple, you lay it on the line that the behaviour ceases now. My father had to take this approach with his difficult in-laws, to great effect. Honesty here is the key. Lying and scowling simply won't do. You can soften the blow by stating correctly that you want to

get on with both of them better. But *no* is not an option. Your wife needs to understand that she is key. Unless she makes a stand, you are probably sunk, but with her acknowledgement of the problem, all of you can move forward.

JM Unacceptable behaviour from the mother-in-law is always difficult to tackle, especially as your wife is so close to her. But please. Hiding in the toilet? I understand an in-law can be intimidating, but boy oh boy, you need to grow a pair and stand up for yourself. Talk to your wife, tell her what the truth is, explaining your point of view, talking calmly and bringing some solutions to the table. If your wife is resistant to these, then you have to grab the dragon by her tail and have a gentle and firm word, asking her what her game is. Tell her all of her positives and really emphasise your desire to seek resolution and to build a healthy son-in-law-mother-in-law relationship.

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RS Infertility is something my family continues to struggle with. Firstly, get the facts concerning your percentage chance of a natural conception. If there is a chance, do whatever is required and pray, as my GP wife helped four infertile couples conceive by adding prayer to IVF. But if the numbers are against you, please remember that at least one in eight couples are infertile. It is a common chronic disease and there is no need to consider yourself less manly than if you were afflicted by liver or kidney failure.

Equally, with no fault attached to you, we simply cannot say why this has happened. But what matters now is how you respond. There are many options available. Amicably discuss the situation, and rather than blaming God, instead ask for His blessing as you share the burden and stay together.

JM I fully appreciate the shock of hearing this news, but the hope I hold onto is that you *may* be infertile, so there is not a definitive diagnosis. My suggestion is that you talk openly and honestly to your wife, including her in everything. Walk each step with her and make her feel part of the situation; she will want to exhaust every avenue with you. I know it is so easy to apportion blame to God for life and misfortune, but people can forget there are other people who are either in the same position or worse off. There will most certainly be support groups, with people in similar positions; also, other options will be made available to you and your wife, so please don't lose hope or blame God, as the reality is, life throws situations at us daily and it's the way individually and together we respond.



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A Tragedy in the Med

Shortly after Sergeant Mehmet Ciplak picked up the toddler, snapshots from the moment – one that he'll never forget – bombarded the world. The powerful photographs prompted a furious outcry. The boy was just a toddler. His family were searching for peace after their country had been torn apart. Their European future, awfully close, would never be.

Through the politics, and the opinions, and the protestations, and the answer-searching melee that consumed the online world, the reality of the situation pierced through it all. The little boy had died, and it was a tragedy.

Sadly, it is a tragedy all too common but too little observed by those of us far from the epicentre of this horror. But on that day we took note. That son could have easily been our own. The innocence of youth shouted louder than our grown-up arguments. We were moved; we were shamed.

The episode was deeply emotional. Too emotional, perhaps, if that were possible. Accompanying the images were the comments and the opinions. The deep and traumatic feelings we experienced at first were later replaced by a haunting suspicion that maybe we had missed something before. Mediterranean deaths aren't new. Families looking for their future across the sea aren't new. This tragedy wasn't original.

We pause to process and our reason catches up with our emotion, like the shy child at primary school who is finally heard after the kid on too much sugar crashes. We reason that our emotion is getting the better of us, and we ought to bring everything in to balance. We should consider the wider problem etc. We won't be hijacked by our emotions, we muse.

But the picture of the boy on the beach doesn't go away. Artists memorialise him and ensure that he is not forgotten.



“FAMILIES LOOKING FOR THEIR FUTURE ACROSS THE SEA AREN'T NEW. THIS TRAGEDY WASN'T ORIGINAL.”

The little boy died, and that is tragic. It is tragic because he was valuable. He was valuable to his family – to his brother, and his parents. He was valuable to his wider community; he may have even been a part of the rebuilding of his country one day. He was valuable to his never-met host country that would have played home to him for a while.

But his value was so much more than that. This little boy was valuable *because he was a little boy*; he was a human being. We may reflect our value as humans by the way we love, the way we work, the way we help others, but our intrinsic value is not in what we do, but in our very being. When tragedy strikes a fellow human, something inside of us breaks for them because deep down we realise the wrongness of the marring of something so dear.

It was right and appropriate for the watching world to catch its breath and experience a sliver of the pain of this boy's life. It was right to be shocked and to be shamed. One of our own had died.

Our emotional responses to pictures of suffering point us to the

felt reality of our inherent value. Our reason then asks questions of this. How and why are we valuable? What determines our dignity?

It seems to me that we have three options here. We can say that human beings aren't valuable (pessimistic and dangerous); or human beings are valuable because we say so (wishful thinking); or human beings are valuable because they have been ascribed value (unconditional). History will tell us that the first option has been tried often, and suppressed entire nations. The second option is where most of us are probably at now (often a position taken because we don't like the former). But the third option – commonly rejected out of hand – is truly interesting. If our experiences in this world point to a value that we can't properly define, shouldn't our search for meaning look to loftier realms?

If the clues lead us to investigate an area that we don't want to go, shouldn't we rethink our underlying assumptions and motives? Europe – by and large – doesn't do God. But the outpouring of grief over this tragic loss suggests that deep down it perhaps so desperately wants to. ■

Jonathan lives in Oxford where he works as a communications consultant, chaplain, and itinerant evangelist – including heading up CVM's Demolition Squad. If there's no rugby on he likes to find the nearest surf break. He blogs at jonathansherwin.net.

 @jonathansherwin



ADVICE

JON COBB

Money

The Wedding Planner

This summer I have had to take time off work midweek to attend weddings of family and friends. Although both very happy occasions, I was a little put out that the couples had both chosen a Thursday to tie the knot, but when I diplomatically asked one of the grooms I was advised that it was simply a cost-cutting exercise. They would not have been able to have afforded the same level of celebration had they married on a Saturday.

I was intrigued and started to do a little research. I have discovered from a gripping read in 'Brides magazine' that the average wedding costs £24,000 (As a father of two girls the second thing I did was get back on my chair.) but I then was comforted by the fact that another survey revealed only 18% of 2000 parents of the bride pay for the wedding in its entirety.

I think it's important to highlight that £24,000 is the average and an average figure entails the extremes at both ends. A more helpful figure would be to find the median. But irrespective, from a personal finance perspective, if the expectations of the couple are not aligned to the payer's budget then there are going to be problems.

I'm the only one in my household who doesn't enjoy *Don't Tell the Bride* on TV, where the groom has to arrange everything without the bride knowing and all for twelve grand. It's typical formulaic TV which is something I can't stand (don't get me started on *X Factor*) but what I do like is that it sets a budget right from the start and that makes a lot of sense. I would seriously counsel anyone against



"CAN A REASONABLE BUDGET BE SET? CAN YOU HIRE A DRESS? THE GROOM HIRES HIS TUX. OR WHAT ABOUT SECOND HAND?"

paying for a wedding on a credit card or an unsecured loan. To have to spend months or years paying off for something which lasted a day is just wrong.

I might incur the wrath of a lot of women and be labelled a male chauvinist pig, but my wife's wedding dress was worn once and has now spent 28 years in a suitcase in the loft. Can a reasonable budget be set? Can you hire a dress? The groom hires his tux. Or what about second hand? Is there a market? I will stop right there for fear of getting hate mail from brides-to-be.

I should think many couples could have a lot of fun finding ways of saving funds by developing a do-it-yourself attitude. I'm attending another wedding on Saturday (I'm just so popular) and the couple have made all the place mats out of old vinyl records purchased at the

Oxfam shop (there had better not be any Mott The Hoople ones as that would be sacrilegious.)

The reception is a big cost and that's why there's a trend towards midweek weddings where the venue will be cheaper, but unless you have a big number to cater for, here is a left field suggestion: Why not have it in a pub, they wouldn't charge anything. My sister got married and her reception was in my other sisters back garden. It was a cracking do and saved her a packet.

A friend of mums to bake the cake? Grow your own flowers? Pool all your friends' photos of the day in Flickr?

At the end of the day, two people who are madly in love and wanting to make a covenant in front of their family friends and God, then who cares that the favours on the table are just a bag of Haribos each? ■

Jon Cobb runs financial advisory business Trinity Wealth Management. He is a keen runner, ex-white-collar boxer, passionate Portsmouth supporter, speaker and writer. Check out Jon's blog: cobbiescollectivecontemplations.blogspot.co.uk.

@CobbyJon





ADVICE

RICHARD HARDY

Family

I Am Becoming My Father

I don't know what your reaction has been when someone has said to you, "You're becoming more like your dad every day." It only happens occasionally, usually at one of those family get-togethers where you meet some distant relation.

I admit that when I was younger I couldn't imagine anything worse, but I have to say that has changed over time. I remember in my mid-twenties visiting my mum and dad. When I arrived dad was in the garden mowing the lawn. He didn't see me as I peered round the side of the house. As I watched him walking up and down I remember thinking with great affection – if I become half the man my father is I won't have done too badly. And that is precisely what I have become, half the man.

No seriously as I have grown older I am beginning to recognise the truth in this statement – I am becoming like my dad. Not that I have necessarily inherited all his best qualities life is never that kind. My dad has always been a very practical, hardworking, generous and sociable individual. Some of this can be said to be true of me. Well apart from the practical and until more recently the generous, but hardworking and sociable that's me.

Now don't get me wrong I am not a clone of my father over the years I have added a few quirks and qualities all my own, both good and bad. That said there is more of my father in me than I have been willing to admit in the past.

Recently my daughter and son in law moved into a new flat. I spent a couple of days helping them move in. More accurately I spent most of my time 'building' Ikea furniture. It was during this process I began to recognise the paternal traits.

I remembered when we moved house early on in our marriage my

dad doing pretty much the same for us as I was doing for them. I realised that I have the same tendency not to read the instructions; not to use the right tools and not to use all the bits. Well not until I'm half way through and notice that I had missed one or two key stages that meant I had to take the whole thing apart and start again. I also discovered I have a great capacity for telling others to do, what if the truth be known I had not done myself. I caught myself at one stage saying, "Now listen Simon (the son in law), the secret with Ikea furniture is to always follow the instructions."

I am also learning generosity, that capacity to gain great delight in giving to others without expecting anything in return. My dad has always been like this. He not only insists on paying his own way, but if he gets half a chance he will pay your way as well. He usually does this when we're out for a meal by saying he needs to pop to toilet just as people are finishing eating and comes back having paid for everybody. Recently I played him at his own game by waiting until the dessert orders had been taken and going to pay before desert arrived.

Whilst this is interesting, well at least to me. Where it becomes useful is as I think about my relationship with own kids. We have been through the 'you're my super hero' phase of early childhood, it was great. We have weathered the storm of the 'I hate your guts' phase of the teenage years. We have passed beyond the 'You're so stupid phase' of late teens and we are into the 'you're useful' phase. I'm encouraged as I look at my own dad that one day, hopefully soon, we will enter the 'if I become half the man...' phase and eventually arrive at the point where my children find themselves doing the things I prize and catching the values I have tried to live by.



"I REALISED THAT I HAVE THE SAME TENDENCY NOT TO READ THE INSTRUCTIONS; NOT TO USE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND NOT TO USE ALL THE BITS."

Maybe just maybe they will one day say as I am doing right now – 'I am become my father' and smile at the thought.

It has struck me how Jesus himself went through the same phase when He says, '*He who has seen me has seen the Father*'. (John 14:9)

Maybe this is the best way for us to influence our children for God and good by living Christian faith out before them and giving them the space and the time to catch what we are, as they become what they are meant to become. ■

Richard Hardy is a Baptist minister and director of the Entheos Trust, which encourages leaders and enables churches to engage with their communities. Richard has spoken on community engagement, marriage and parenting at many national conferences. He has also written extensively on community and family issues. Visit theentheostrust.org.





OPINION

SAM GIBB

Faith

Breaking Free



“THERE ARE THREE FILM SCENES THAT MAKE ME WEEP LIKE A LITTLE GIRL.”

I didn't cry at my own wedding. I generally don't cry; in fact, for a number of years I was convinced that my parents had had my tear ducts removed. Perhaps, I thought, that explains the unending dribble of excess saliva which caused my parents to keep me in a bib through what felt like most of primary school – I mean, the water had to go somewhere.

There are, however, three film scenes that make me weep like a little girl who has simultaneously stubbed her toe, dropped her ice cream, and entered the dentist's surgery. Weep scene one is the death of Maximus in *Gladiator*, as Russell Crowe falls to the ground and is carried off by fellow slaves while a powerful voice sings “*Anol shalom. Anol sheh lay konnud de ne um*” etc.

The second tear-jerker is the epic montage of Carl and his wife, Ellie, at the start of the animated film *Up* where, in four amazing minutes, the chaps at Disney Pixar manage to gently caress our hearts before ripping them out, tying them to a helium-filled balloon and sending

them beating into the air.

The third weep-fest, though, is found in the sixth Harry Potter film, as Dobby, slowly dying in Harry's arms, utters the incredible words, “Such a beautiful place... to be with friends.”

Big-eared and goggle-eyed house-elf Dobby (who recently starred as Manchester United flop Ángel Di Maria) is a slave to the dreadful Malfoy family. Treated like dirt, hated and despised by his owners, Dobby is forced to do whatever they ask, even punishing himself when he realises he is letting his master down.

But then Dobby meets Potter. Dobby has never met a kinder wizard. Harry calls Dobby his friend. Dobby has never been a friend to a wizard. Harry is nothing like the Malfoys. And, when Harry frees Dobby from the Malfoy family, Dobby turns and begins to joyfully, willingly, lovingly serve his rescuer. It is Dobby's joy to serve Harry. He never again has to serve his evil master. Dobby can rejoice in his freedom.

Fellas (and over-the-shoulder-reading ladies), we are to sin what

Dobby was to the Malfoys. Yet we are to God what Dobby is to Harry Potter. Like Dobby, we were owned by sin, unable to free ourselves and eternally bound to slavery. Yet, like Dobby, we have now been freed from sin to serve the God who set us free; we are not bound to serve him, but are free to serve.

Dobby was set free by a hidden sock. We have been freed in an epically more incredible way. The apostle Paul tells us that “our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6, NIV 2011 UK). Jesus, the biblical death-defeater, in a stunt more fitting for a Bruce Willis film than a Sunday school classroom, metaphorically comes and gaffer-tapes the believer to himself, smashing through the windscreen of death and into an awesome new life. Christians, we are not blokes who have had a near-death experience, but blokes who have had a through-death experience. And through death we are freed from the slavery of our old life to live for the Saviour in our new life. ■



Sam Gibb is a Midlands born, London based, twenty-something married to a Yorkshire lass. His passion is to present the Good News about Jesus in a way that makes sense to blokes. His heroes are the apostle Paul, Alan Shearer and Garfield, though not necessarily in that order.

@samggibb

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Christians and Politics



It was 1964 and Harold Wilson had just become the first Labour Prime Minister for thirteen years. I was a grammar school boy in Caerphilly, and like many of my generation felt strongly

about the way working class communities suffered such disadvantages compared to those who'd inherited all the power, money and privileges society had to offer. Our MP had the second highest Labour majority in the country and socialist ideas were part and parcel of our South Wales communities. There were stories of English colliery owners exploiting mineworkers – often paying part of their wages in vouchers to be spent in their own overpriced shops. My Dad was known as Red Bowring (partly because of his hair colouring but also for his political views.) and I joined the Young Socialist League, keen to be actively involved – maybe we'd describe it today as being slightly 'radicalised'. Who knows? I could have ended up as a local Labour Councillor or even an MP.

However this wasn't to be, as shortly after this I was caught up in a new enthusiasm – youth evangelism – and this later led me on into the ordained ministry. Distracted, and also discouraged by my church who believed politics of any kind to be worldly, I became less concerned about workers rights and more motivated by the truth and power of the gospel to transform their lives. Of course Jesus taught His followers to attend to both. In Luke 4 He entered the

Nazareth synagogue to read from Isaiah a prophecy about His own ministry 'to proclaim good news to the poor... freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind and to set the oppressed free.'

We must encourage young people to care about issues of freedom and justice – but they need God's wisdom too, to avoid becoming unhelpfully extreme. And not just teens and twenty-somethings; whatever our age lets rekindle our earlier zeal and fight for the causes close to our hearts. Nobody can campaign for everything but we can be alert to pray and act when needed. At CARE we often ask our supporters for help, especially on issues of human dignity and protection.

“WE MUST ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT ISSUES OF FREEDOM AND JUSTICE.”

Christians today are more open to the political scene, which is excellent. Everything is so unpredictable and we need people of integrity and wisdom in influential positions to help shape our uncertain future. I confess that I never thought one single party would ever again win a majority in a General Election – but was proved very wrong. The rise of the SNP,

Labour's losses, the collapse of the Lib Dems, disappointing results for UKIP and a Conservative working majority allowing Mr Cameron to form a government took us all by surprise. How will these events play out in coming months and years? Who among us will be the movers and shakers – whether from a left, right or centre position? May we never just be complacent about fairness, justice and freedom there will always be some small thing we can do to help others in need. ■

Lyndon Bowring was born in Wales and studied at London Bible College. He is an associate minister at Kensington Temple, and has been executive chairman of CARE for more than 25 years. His hobbies include watching rugby, exploring London's restaurants and developing friendships. He lives in London with his wife Celia, and they have three children.



Cut to the Chase

We All Get It But How Do We Handle It?

BY LEE JACKSON

Here's my feedback on, err, feedback. In the last few years, feedback has become the norm everywhere; we are swimming in the stuff. If you've worked in the hospitality industry and a customer is unhappy, they can review you on TripAdvisor before they've even left your building these days; the world had changed.

1. Learn to sieve it

I've learnt to listen to all feedback, but to sieve it all in my head, sometimes even while it's being given to me. Feedback comes with baggage, so ask – who's giving me this? Why are they giving me this? What are their motives? Keep sieving and you can disregard some feedback and take on board some, but never take on all.

2. Not everyone's opinion really matters

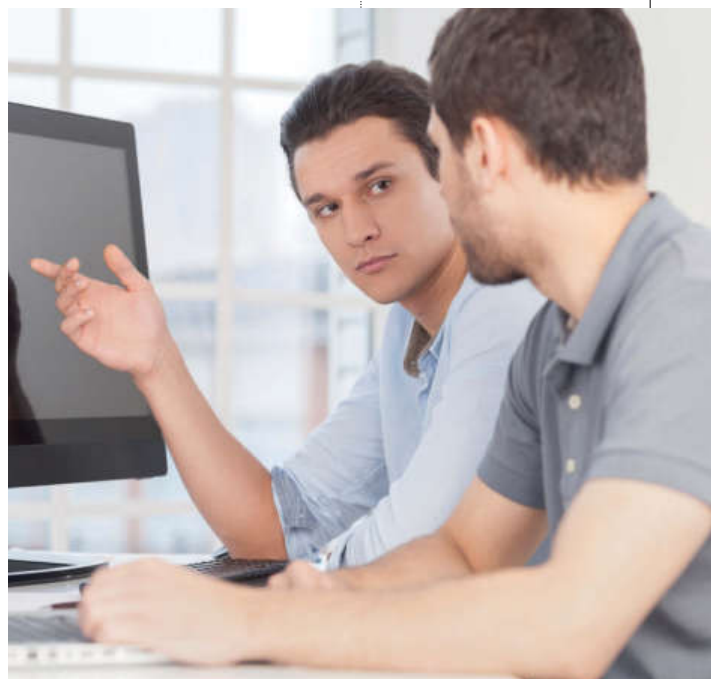
This seems harsh, I know, but it's true. In my industry (speaking) I have seen new speakers give other new speakers long and detailed feedback as if they are experts. Their feedback as a human being is perfectly valid, of course, but unless they are experienced in the field, it's just not as valuable as someone who's been speaking for years. Everyone's opinion is valid, but it doesn't always carry the same weight and impact.

It's everywhere, and frankly, lads, if we don't learn to deal with it, it can mess with our heads, because it's a lot easier to give it out than to receive it, for most blokes. Some people I've met run away from all feedback as they've been hurt in the past from a boss who was blunt, manipulative or just a poor people-person. But even if we have had bad experiences, it's part of life now, and we need to find a way to process it.

So, here are my five *Sorted* quick tips on dealing with feedback of any sort.

3. Don't take it personally

This is a challenging one, but if you want to keep on going, it's essential. If you get feedback on a work issue, it's work, it's not usually a personal attack. Just because someone says that your report-writing isn't as good as it should be doesn't mean that you are a bad person. It means that you may need some more training, or you may need to give that task to someone else to do. Life can be challenging enough without battering our self-esteem with stuff that isn't relevant.

**4. Ask yourself, is this true?**

Some feedback is right and proper. Some feedback we should take on board; it's what makes us better at our job or helps us become a better man. Self-awareness is the key to all but beard growth and part of that is being able to say, "Yeah, they were right. I need to change that."

And finally...

5. Keep the good stuff and use it

Why not use the good feedback you get as a day-to-day help? I literally keep the good stuff I get. I have a little book that I use where I keep good feedback or comments from clients, even notes from family and friends. I know it might sound weird or egotistical, but it's not, it's just a tool in my toolbox. When I'm travelling to work, or even just before I step on stage and speak, I might have a look at these pieces of feedback and it helps me focus for the task ahead. It gets me into the right frame of mind. Often as blokes

our default thinking can be grumpy and negative; we think of the worst rather than the best. This little trick might just get you in the right mood to perform well and enjoy life a bit more. It's not a Jedi mind trick – "This is not the feedback you're looking for..." – it's just a simple way to get us on the right track to enjoying life and being better as a bloke at work and at home.

Feedback: Collect it, use it, process it wisely, read it when you need to, but don't live your life for it or by it. Sorted.



Lee Jackson is a speaker and powerpoint surgeon(!) He's also one half of 'Lee and Baz' where, with his mate Baz Gascoyne has written men's books and spoken/eaten curry at loads of mens events. His website is leejackson.biz.

 @leejackson

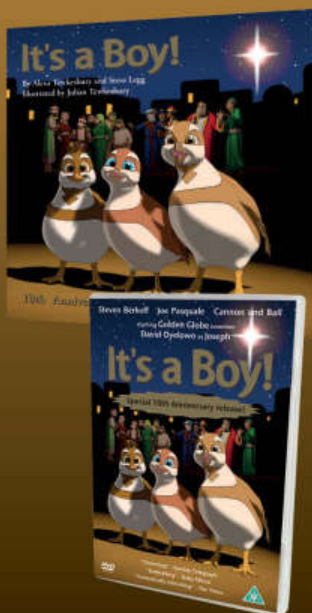
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Sporting 87

Action from a 1st team fixture

BY STUART WEIR

Sporting 87 of Bury St Edmunds is a football club, one of 40,000 or so which exist in England. There are a number of things that make Sporting 87 a bit special. These include its size, its scope and its values. When a dozen young men at a Christian conference in 1987- hence the name - decided to start a football team, they could never have expected it to grow and develop as it has.

Looking back at those frantic early days of learning how to run a football club - finding a pitch, securing a place in a league at the last minute and then finding a set of second hand kit, it all looks pretty chaotic compared to the well-oiled, slick machine that is Sporting 2015.

Writing in a programme of a game to celebrate the club's 25th anniversary, the chairman of Suffolk FA, Mick Pearce, described Sporting as a "well-run and forward thinking club...one of the best clubs within Suffolk" adding in terms of their lack of foul language and "absolute respect for their opponents they were years ahead of the FA Respect programme".

In 1999 the club advertised youth training sessions and half a dozen boys came along. Now, Director of Football, Jonathan Warnock told me, "In the adult section we have three adult teams with about hundred players signed on. We have 17 youth teams with 350 kids signed on. The teams run from Under 9 to Under 18. And in some age groups we have more than one team - for example four teams in Under 10s. Each year we are determined

Jonathan Warnock



not to grow any more then more kids turn up and we grow! More people want to be involved with us so what do you do?" In 2011 a girls' section was formed.

Having 350 kids train on the same evening seems a logistical nightmare. Training runs from 5pm to 10pm on two sites - a school and an astro pitch. They club pays £12,000 a year to hire training facilities. With youth matches on Saturday morning and adult games on Saturday afternoon, it is as big a challenge to fit up to 17 teams onto the nine pitches at their home, the Victory Ground. On occasions they have to hire other pitches.

The club has maintained its unashamed Christian basis. The motto is "Witness through football" which is elaborated upon to demand that "behaviour when playing, coaching or administering football should be consistent with the teachings procedures, standards, rules, codes of conduct and development systems. The club applies three key themes to all it does

- Providing opportunity
- Playing with integrity
- Caring about everyone

Cameron Brown a Sporting coach giving advice to a youth team group



Other principles include;

- Educating, instilling confidence and developing life skills using football
- Achieving health and wellbeing through football
- Affording equal opportunities and full inclusion in football

The high quality of the club has been recognized in many ways. The club has won the Suffolk FA Charter Club of the Year Award, prestigious FA national awards for its Young Leaders Programme, and has had the honour of receiving two of only 150 FA National Awards for services to grassroots football (representing over 400,000 volunteers throughout the country). They are a Nike partner club. Recently they were asked by two local primary schools to take over all their football. As Jonathan Warnock says, "Nationally there are a number of problems with kids' football but we have a good reputation for dealing with those problems".

Being a Christian club operating in secular football has not caused any problems with Leagues or the County FA. However when the club applied for Community Sports Association status, they were turned down as the powers that be decided that the club's

"NATIONALLY THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS WITH KIDS' FOOTBALL BUT WE HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION FOR DEALING WITH THOSE PROBLEMS."

constitution suggested that they were not primarily a football club. A bizarre ruling.

That the club has a Christian basis can lead to people expecting perfection from players – not all of whom would call themselves Christians. Warnock, however, seems this as an opportunity to explain that Christians are not perfect – just forgiven.

The off the field activities are as important as the on field. An example is the weekly player development centre to which everyone is welcome. On Thursday evenings there are team based training sessions. On Tuesday player development activities are different, as Warnock explains, "For the player development centre there is not a standard which you have to attain to get in. If you just want to improve your own individual and football ability but not to get in a team, you can come. The session is 90 minutes – 45 practical and 45 theory in the classroom, for Under 9s and upwards. This has been phenomenally successful and the theory side has been more successful than I could ever have imagined. We include some Christian

content within that and some psychological analysis. One of the parents is an expert in children with educational special needs. With parental permission we have done some testing of kids. Through this children with particular emotional or other needs have been identified and helped".

The club has also established the Sporting 87 Educational Trust, a charity that delivers and supports various football based services, programmes and events in the local community. Its activities are categorised under four modes of provision, Academy, Community, Schools Support and Holiday Clubs. The Trust's strapline sums up its method "learn to play – play to learn".

It delivers football experiences for children aged from 3 1/2 to 6 through its Tots Footy programme, and for older children through community football programmes, schools support work, holiday clubs and personal development centre (PDC). The Educational Trust also provides fun and social adult football sessions through its indoor Futsal programmes. →



Action from a Sporting Youth team game

Other activities include the **Young Leaders Programme** (ages 12 to 18), which aims to develop broad life and leadership skills, a **Personal Improvement Programmes** (ages 7 to 14) as well as **Coaches Education Programme** and a **Volunteers Education Programme** to support the learning development of the voluntary workforce of the club.

Sporting 87's home ground is The Victory Ground, Bury St Edmunds. The ground was originally owned by Greene King as a sports ground for their employees. When they were no longer using it, Greene King gave it to the Borough of St Edmundsbury. The way Sporting 87 came to be based there is another of those amazing stories that keep emerging as one delves into the club.

A few years ago, the local authorities were concerned with the upkeep and running costs of the facility. They were approached by the local cricket club and a neighbouring Independent School who wanted to take over the facility. The Borough did not feel that either or both were quite the right fit as they both, arguably, represented a particular segment of the community. The Borough felt that football – the national game – needed to be part of any development and recommended to the school and cricket club that they seek to involve a local football club, mentioning that Sporting 87 was a well-run, local football club with deep roots in the community.

And so Sporting 87 became part of a Community Interest Group which was formed to operate the Victory Ground. The facilities at that stage were a bit run-down but have now been developed into an impressive modern complex meeting the needs of the sports clubs

“SPORTING 87 IS VERY MUCH A FOOTBALL CLUB BUT ONE WHICH OPERATES FROM A HIGH MORAL FRAMEWORK.”

involved as well as being available to the wider community. As Warnock says, “It is amazing and so encouraging that Sporting 87, known as a Christian club, is so embedded in the local sports community. I am amazed at the favour we have received.”

Part of the outworking of the Christian ethos of the club is the way players are treated. There are meetings with new players, explaining the ethos of the club. At the end of the season, there is a review meeting with each player in the adult teams.

Before each game there is an informal “Prayer and share” in the changing room. While this may sound like a gathering of “holy Joes”, it is anything but. It consists of each player being given the chance to share anything good or bad that has happened in the week and someone praying about the issues raised. Players with no obvious Christian faith routinely share anxieties from family or work.

Warnock says, “Over the years I have been amazed what people share. I try to pick up any pastoral issues sensitively and contact the player privately if appropriate. I seem to have developed a massive pastoral role within the club, I suppose it is years of building up trust and just being there for people and taking an interest and they talk to you about their lives. All you have to do is show some care and attention and people value that.


I believe that people are searching for spiritual answers but not looking to the

church for those answers. They look to all sorts of other places but when they come across Christians who are prepared to say, ‘I haven’t got all the answers but I can empathize with you and pray about it, I think they realize that that has some integrity.’

When youth games are going on the club has a group of “football pastors” – with yellow armband to identify them – on duty who just walk around and talk to parents. There are people from local churches. Sometimes they may pick up information that should be passed on to managers or managers might ask them to look out for a family with a particular need. This is just another aspect of the care the club provides for its players.

Sporting 87 is very much a football club but one which operates from a high moral framework, based on the teaching of Jesus Christ and one which seeks to live out the good news that Jesus brings in all aspects of life in the community. ■

Stuart Weir is passionate about Jesus Christ and about sport, and he spends his life trying to help people make the connection. He has written several books about sport and Christianity and has worked as a sports writer at Olympic, Paralympic and World Championship events. He has been to three football World Cups and was Togo's Olympic attaché at the 2012 Olympics. Married to Lynne, he has two grown-up children. He is a member of Kidlington Baptist Church and Frilford Heath Golf Club.

 @stuartweir



Celebrating promotion to the Premier League

Rags to Riches

AFC Bournemouth's promotion to the Barclays Premier League is one of football's stories of the century. *Sorted* sent Stuart Weir to find how it happened.

Spending a morning at a Premier League club was no chore at all for me. I spent three hours wandering around the Vitality Stadium on a Friday morning. I was connecting with my

inner "little boy".

From my arrival at main reception – no official security guard to be pleaded with – when the receptionist knew I was coming and welcomed me warmly, it was obvious that Bournemouth had made the transition to

Premier League status without losing the character of the club. Being able to wander through the stadium out to the training pitch, where manager Eddie Howe was busily setting out cones, watching training – what better way to spend a sunny morning?

It is a real rags-to-riches story because in 2008 the club had debts of £4 million and was about to be closed down as bankrupt. To get from that position to the Premier League in seven years is nothing short of a miracle. The club has progressed from the third tier of

English football to the Premier League in just three years and without any real star players.

One of Bournemouth's biggest challenges as a Premier League club is their stadium. They have played at Dean Court for over 100 years; due to the sponsorship deal, it is now called Vitality Stadium. However, it is the same ground and holds less than 12,000 people.

Neil Vacher is the club secretary. He started coming to Dean Court with his dad in the 1960s. Prior to becoming club secretary, he has been the match-day announcer, →



Celebrating promotion to the Premier League

AFC Bournemouth

“THE CLUB HAS CHANGED ENORMOUSLY – REAL ROY OF THE ROVERS STUFF. WE COULD NEVER HAVE FORESEEN WHAT HAS HAPPENED.”



Chaplain Andy Rimmer

Marc Pugh scores in Bournemouth's win at West Ham



he ran the club shop, had a spell running the Cherry Hotshots lottery, ran the travel club and stood in as kit man for three months. Reflecting on the past few years, he said, “The club has changed enormously – real Roy of the Rovers stuff. We could never have foreseen what has happened. When I first came here in a full-time capacity in 2001, we were working from Portakabins while the new stadium was being built. From there we have managed to keep our heads above water – only just, with players and staff not sure they were

going to be paid on a number of occasions. We were playing in League One and Two. But throughout all the time, the prevailing spirit here has been tremendous – from the supporters, staff, players – everybody has always stuck together. Then by chance, in a sense, we have come across a good young manager and a financial backer of the club and the combination of the two has enabled us to go off on this course.”

Pete Barry, player liaison officer, has two responsibilities. He does the travel logistics

Action Images / Andrew Couldridge Livepic



Celebrating Marc Pugh's goal

Bournemouth. His previous clubs included Bury, Luton Town, Hereford United and Shrewsbury Town. Suddenly he finds himself a Premier League player and – the icing on the cake – a Premier League goalscorer. He told me: “The turnaround and transformation of the club has been remarkable. We have a great training ground and all the new facilities ... To see the club progress and to be a part of it has been amazing.

“Every young boy wants to play in the Premiership. From a really young age, I dreamt of playing in the Premier League. My heroes back then were Eric Cantona, Ryan Giggs and all those top players – and now to be mixing with world-class players, the best in the business, is a great way to test yourself. It means the world to me.”

Pugh made it clear that Bournemouth are not stargazers but are determined to surprise a few people. It was relatively early in season when we spoke, but he was really upbeat: “The experience of going to Premier League clubs has been brilliant, and I think we have proved that we’re not in the division just to make up the numbers. We are holding our own and playing some good football. And I am sure that will take us a long way. It is a positive start to the season and to be mid-table is a great achievement.”

He picked out the 1–0 defeat at Liverpool – when even the Premier League acknowledged that the referee should have disallowed Liverpool’s goal for offside – and what it meant to go to Liverpool, not as underdogs in a cup-tie but on equal terms as a Premier League club. “It is an amazing experience and we held our own pretty well – Anfield is one of the great stadiums in the world and every player wants to play there. The atmosphere at the start of the game was excellent. It is what dreams are made of – a great day; shame about the result.”

A visit to the medical room gave me a stark reminder of how harsh professional sport can be. I met Tyrone Mings, an £8 million summer signing from Ipswich who was injured minutes into his Premier League debut, suffering torn anterior and medial ligaments in his knee. His dream of playing in the Premier League lasted just six minutes before his season ended. →

for the away fixtures – League and Cup in the UK and pre-season games abroad. His other responsibility is the welfare of the players in all that that involves – buying and selling houses, flats, cars, etc – career development plans and that sort of thing. Making sure that new players settle as quickly as possible in terms of accommodation, and that the families are looked after is a priority.

Premier League status has added to his workload: “On the player welfare side, there have been massive changes. The demands on players are significantly more and we have to be careful how we manage the players and the pressures that are on them.

“We have had an influx of new players from the UK and abroad [the current Bournemouth squad includes at least nine international players]. Finding them accommodation and dealing with language issues that come up and making sure that that is sorted ... so that they can understand what’s going on and what coaches are saying – that has happened a lot now, something that didn’t happen much in the past.”

I spotted on Pete’s noticeboard “Fly to Norwich” – a far cry from the days when paying the petrol for the team coach might have been a concern. “In those we were flying nowhere. This year – not counting cup games where we don’t know where we’re playing – we will fly eight or nine times.”

Marc Pugh is a typical Bournemouth player. Aged 28 he is now in his sixth season at



John Motson on Bournemouth

I expect them to do what a lot of clubs which come up do – that is, start like a house on fire and surprise a few teams, win some home games, even against high-profile opposition. But the question is always whether you can sustain it over the season. They have got an overseas owner but they have not splashed multimillions into the squad in the summer.

Of course, they have to make ground improvements as required by Premier League regulations. The Bournemouth ground only holds 12,000. I think it will be a case of trying to hold on for the season. At the beginning of last season, not many people would have put Bournemouth in the top two, but they surprised everyone.

They have been well coached – Eddie Howe has done an amazing job at Bournemouth. But they will have a lot of players who are adjusting to the Premier League, most of them for the first time in their careers. I think you would be a brave man to say that they will definitely survive in the Premier League but won’t it be fun watching them try.



Stoke's Erik Pieters in action with Bournemouth's Matt Ritchie

Bournemouth's Dan Gosling celebrates



“IT IS A VERY UNUSUAL STORY, REALLY, FOR A CLUB LIKE US TO FIND ITS WAY TO THE PREMIER LEAGUE.”

Neil Vacher gave me some further thoughts on achieving the requirements of the Premier League without destroying or changing the club. “It is a very unusual story, really, for a club like us to find its way to the Premier League. But everything about the club has always been homely. The supporters have helped so much in the past and have been very much part of this club. There have always been made to feel welcome and have had access to the players far beyond what most clubs would have given them. And the players have been happy to interact with them. The same group of players has been with us since League One and [they] have seen us go up into the Premiership. That continuity has

certainly helped, and new players joining have bought into ... the ethos that the fans are part of the club. That is something I don't think we will ever forget.”

Andy Rimmer has been chaplain of AFC Bournemouth for eight years. He describes his role as a “pastoral and spiritual safety net. I am here to be a support to the whole club, to be a friend – but a friend with the God aspect to my friendship. I meet a few players for Bible study once a week. I go to church with a few players; I have done Alpha courses for players and families. We have an annual club carol service’.

His presence is clearly appreciated. Neil Vacher said, “The chaplain has an important

role, without any doubt. In times of stress and difficulty, it is a real help to have a chaplain on hand to deal with any issues that players or staff wish to address.” Pete Barry put it like this: “I think one aspect of what Andy brings is the neutralness of where he is coming from. He is not part of the staff in the same way that I am or the manager [is], so players can approach him and talk about things they probably would not do with [us]. And I think that is an essential part of the make-up of the club, that we have that in place.” Marc Pugh says, “Since I moved to the club, Andy has been an inspiration to me. He is always smiling. If you're having a down day, he is always there to pick you up.”

It has become part of the AFC Bournemouth pre-match ritual that a few people pray together. A few years ago, Andy approached the manager, saying, “A couple of players would like to pray before the game ... Are you OK with that?” The manager was fine with it, and it happens before every home game. Andy told me, “We have three or four players and perhaps one or two coaching staff. I do a two-minute talk and we pray in a huddle. It is over in five minutes. I never pray about the result, but that there'll be no injuries, and acknowledge our God-given talents”.

Marc Pugh values these get-togethers. “We have a general chat-chat. He will read something from the Bible that speaks out regarding the week and we have a little prayer together, being thankful for everything we have got. It relaxes you as you look forward to the game.”

In a season when Manchester United have spent in excess of £50 million on a teenager and Manchester City and Chelsea continue to buy new players when they already have an enormous squad, it is good to see a club run on traditional values, to whom fans are important, not only reaching the Premier League but looking at home. ■

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FITNESS

With Phil Baines

Get back to it. Don't back down. Back yourself.



We can't move forward without our backs. Often neglected when we exercise, yet this is probably the most essential part of our anatomy in terms of structure.

We have looked before in previous articles at how our lifestyles are increasingly working against us in terms of posture. Sitting sown for long periods, slouching on sofas probably worst of all, hunched over car steering wheels, and computers all contribute to problems with our backs.

The back is an amazing structure. The spine is divided into five sections from bottom up: Coccyx, sacral, lumbar, thoracic and cervical. These have a different number of vertebrae. Surrounding these are a complex layer of muscles. Some of these muscles are quite deep, others more superficial, but all perform different tasks that when combined give us our forwards, backwards, lateral movements as well as rotation. These muscles are also part of our core and link with our abs to form a band around our waist. This deep core is essential for our balance, stability and movement.

So how do we exercise these various muscles?

1 Pelvic floor – Yes these are very good for the lower back. Really neglected by us blokes, but one of the most important exercises to do. Probably neglected because it doesn't feel like you are doing much and certainly doesn't tire you. You may have heard the term engage your abs but what does that mean? The easiest way to explain for us men is in four moves.

Lying on you back with knees bent –

- A** Pull you're whats-its, your balls up – no movement in the back.
- B** Feel like you are tightening your belt.
- C** Push your lower back into the floor.
- D** Keep breathing as you do it. Don't hold your breath.

Do this 15 times, engage hold for five seconds, relax and repeat. Add in a pelvic tilt, again engage, tilt the pelvis, and hold for five seconds and release. These exercises are excellent for the deep core muscles.

2 Gluteal Bridge – lie on your back, knees bent and push up onto your shoulders, really pushing your hips into the air, squeezing your glutes (butt). Hold for as long as you can, up to a minute. Once you can do a minute comfortably you can progress to single leg for 10 seconds, change legs for 10 seconds and so on for a minute.

3 Sphinx – lie on your front. Put your hands alongside your head and push up, bending at the hips keeping your legs stay firmly on the floor. Hold for 5-10 seconds and gently come down, push up gently, hold again 5-10 seconds come down again-repeat 5-10 times.

4 Abs exercises – these also strengthen the back. Plank, side plank, crunches etc. Be careful if you have any problems with your back as rather than doing good they can begin to do harm. Make sure the back is held in a solid position.

Other exercises – seated rows, rowing machine, lat pull downs.

You need a strong back for your life so it's well worth looking after it.

Strong back = Strong body.



Phil Baines is passionate about fitness and sport. He recently began a venture called Fit 4 The Challenge (f4tc.co.uk), which offers a range of physical challenges for diverse abilities. Phil organises each challenge and trains individuals and teams to complete them, either for charity or for personal achievement or both. Phil is married with two teenage sons.



HEALTHY COOKING

With Chef Mike Darracott



Dundee Cake

INGREDIENTS

- 300g soft brown sugar
- 1 tbsp black treacle
- 2 tsp mixed spice
- A of pinch salt
- 4 large eggs, beaten
- 60g blanched almonds for decoration
- 310g plain flour
- 300g butter
- 405g currants
- 3g desiccated coconut
- 310g sultanas
- 305g raisins
- Juice and zest of half a small lemon
- 55g cut mixed peel

METHOD

- 1 Heat oven to 150°C 300°F Gas Mark 2.
 - 2 Grease and line a 23cm round cake tin.
 - 3 Next cream the butter and sugar. Add the beaten eggs and treacle.
 - 4 Mix in spice and salt and flour, and add all other ingredients.
 - 5 Spoon the mixture into the prepared tin, and arrange the nuts on top like the pictures shows, cover the top with greaseproof paper.
 - 6 Bake for 4 to 4½ hours
- Enjoy and have a very Merry Christmas from Chef Mike Darracott

Michael J Darracott has been an executive chef at various large establishments. He has cooked for more than 200 people at a time, including a number of celebrities, and has published several books. For more information, visit chefmikedarracott.com.

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HUMOUR

PAUL KERENSA

Kneel-Down Stand-Up

"NO OFFENCE TO PLUMBERS, BUT ONLY ONE OF THEM WANTED TO BE THERE."



Christmas Gigs

I've always loved doing stand-up comedy... except at Christmas. Fellow comedian Stephen Grant once noted that on the comedy circuit, "December pays for August." August's our playtime: Edinburgh Festival's creatively freeing but costly.

December aims to recoup that, but the price is facing Christmas party season.

I do love Christmas: the build-up and the day itself, Advent and Yuletide, German markets and turkey sandwiches. I revel in the Christian side *and* the commercial, although the shops' countdown could start nearer October than August. I love Wham, Wizzard and Wombles; John McLean, Jimmy Stewart, John & Yoko; Nine Lessons & Carols, two turtle doves and A Fairytale in New York – I'll take it all. Except those office party gigs.

I am grateful of course – party season funds Christmas for countless comics, and covers January's fallowness and August's festival debts. But the gigs can vary in playability. The worst is the Friday before Christmas – 'Black Friday' – when work parties are at peak booking, and each stand-up is thrown at a baying mob of nurses or estate agents. If you're wanting a quiet night out on that date, beware.

An example: A few years back I played Jongleurs Cardiff, a stag-heavy club at the best of times. That Black Friday, the biggest group was a gaggle of ninety plumbers. Well

not "gaggle". A "flood of plumbers"? A "blockage"? (These are just some of the jokes that would have got nothing that night). No offence to plumbers, but only one of them wanted to be there. Eighty-nine of them wanted the disco, so we comedians were merely an obstruction, to be flushed away. So they talked throughout, to each other, or to the comedian, in a somewhat loud and brusque manner, using language that belonged on the other end of their plungers.

Nine years ago, I tried putting on a different sort of Christmas gig. Comedy shows in churches were nothing new, but on the resurgence, partly thanks to my comic colleagues Andy Kind and Tony Vino. So I trialled 'Nine Comedians & Carols' at my local church, running four hours so everyone missed the last train, but it kind of worked. We've tweaked it (and shrunk it – it turns out four comedians is ample), and for the past few years these delightful shows have replaced the plumberfests. They're mostly in churches, and they're full of joy, and crucially punters. Frequently the minister will look at a standing-room-only audience and say, "I don't recognise half of these people." Which either means they're drawing newcomers or the minister has absolutely no idea who attends each week.

Occasionally I feel a lure back to the secular office party gigs – although only if the

plumbers pipe down ("Pipe down." Of course. The perfect line always arrives nine years too late – a bit like the plumbers). Those gigs fund Christmas for the comedians and the staff, so I'm glad the gigs exist. If you feel like some festive stand-up, don't wait for a DVD in your stocking; grab some friends and seek it live – whether at your local comedy club, or maybe just maybe, at your church. ■

Paul Kerensa is an award-winning stand-up comic and author of the book *So a Comedian Walks Into a Church*. He co-won a British Comedy Award for writing on the BBC's *Miranda*, and the Royal Television Society (RTS) Award for *Not Going Out*, as well as working on other shows that history has thankfully forgotten. Visit paulkerensa.com to find out more.

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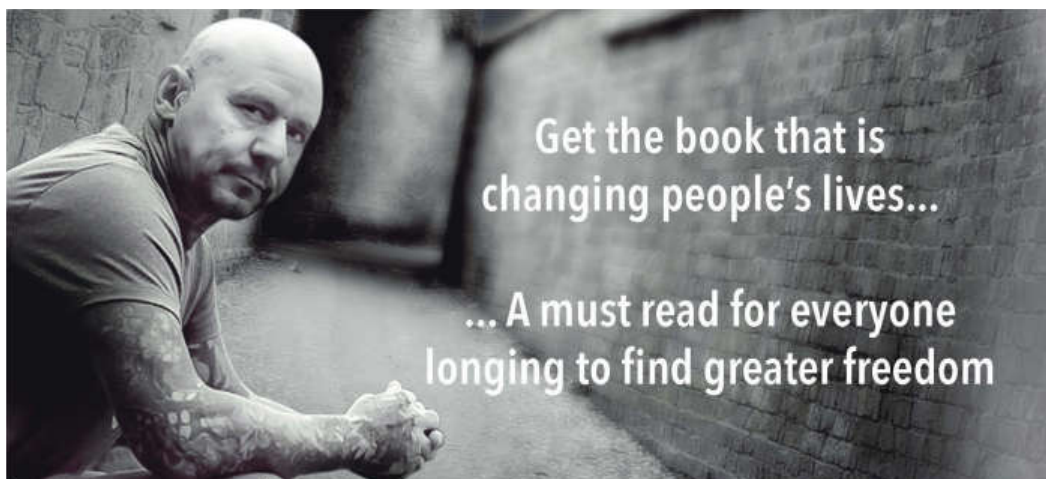


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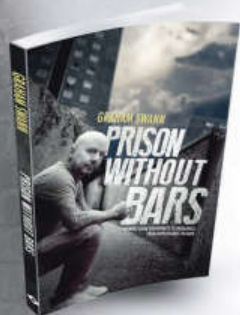
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HUMOUR

TONY VINO

In Vino Veritas

Turn Up for the Books

When doing a Q&A, I'm often asked what the most important thing is when it comes to writing stand-up. If I'm feeling facetious I say, "The hyphen." My serious answer is that whether writing for stage or page the most important thing is to simply *turn up*. People are fascinated by the sources of inspiration and writing processes – do you use a pen and paper, index cards, or are the routines gifted from heaven on golden plates by the angel Gabriel? All that is secondary to simply sitting down and writing.

Like any form of work, turning up is the foundation to all creative processes. However, unlike other types of work, when it comes to art and creativity, people think normal rules don't apply. With a 'regular' job, you have to turn up and do it, even if you are not in the mood. Imagine a tannoy announcement at a GP's waiting room: 'Unfortunately, Doctor Hammond is unable to see anyone today as he is not feeling the muse.' No McDonald's employee when told to serve at the tills has asked, "Yes, but what is my inspiration?" (The answer is £8.67 an hour.)

The best comedians don't just see the 30 minutes on stage as their job, but spend their days working on material improving the craft. They don't wait for inspiration to hit, a call from the BBC commissioning department, or the moon to be in line with Aquarius; they simply write. And why not? Most people work nine to five; some comedians struggle to work more than nine to half-past.

Everyone is an artisan within their own world. Creativity and artistry are part of being human. The ability to create something from our imagination separates us from the animals (that and cutlery). However, there is a natural force working against bringing your creative self to the surface. Whenever you try to get on with your creative project, there is a sense of resistance almost like gravity. As you push in one direction, there is a push back. It's like the feeling you get when waking up too early for work. The alarm



goes off and all you want to do is hit the 'snooze button'. That force of resistance can take many distracting forms: lethargy, an internal critic saying what you are doing is rubbish, lunch invite, or an urgent desire to rearrange your sock drawer.

There are loads of books on art and creativity. I have read a tonne of them. In fact, many times I have sat down to write and ended up instead just reading a book on creative writing. It's like planning to go jogging then sitting on the couch reading *Men's Health* magazine instead. All of these books say the same thing. You simply need to get on and do the work without succumbing to distractions in order for something amazing to be produced. I reckon there was rarely an 'Out to Lunch' sign pasted to the front door of the Sistine Chapel when Michelangelo was around.

So, whatever that creative project is within you, it is only you that can gift it to the world. Whether a song, a poem, a talk, a new plan for the office layout, just turn up and do it. There are no shortcuts, no magic

formulas to getting good, just action. Don't prejudge your best efforts before you have started. I will leave you with something Van Gogh once wrote: "If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint', then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced." ■

Tony VINO is a professional comedian who straddles the world of comedy clubs, festivals and churches. For more information see tonyvino.co.uk.

@tonyvino



"NO MCDONALD'S EMPLOYEE WHEN TOLD TO SERVE AT THE TILLS HAS ASKED, "YES, BUT WHAT IS MY INSPIRATION?"



Viva la Difference...

French was never my subject at school. My long-suffering French teacher, Mr. Ernie Peckett, (his real name, believe me) finally booted me out of the class because I got my French salutations wrong. I wanted to attract the attention of the spotty youth who sat at the desk in front of me. Instead of greeting him with a jaunty “*Bonjour Monsieur.*”, I cut to the quick and jabbed him in the left buttock with a compass point. The wounded chap, not consoled by the fact that he had pierced flesh 20 years before it became fashionable, roared his protest in English, which signalled my final exit from the class.

So it is that I am now, like many English people, able to say *please* and *thank you* in French, and little more. Oh, I can also ask the time in French – but this is of no use, as I have my own watch. And I can ask for directions to the railway station – and knowing the way to *la gare* would have been helpful on a number of occasions – but I wouldn’t be able to understand the reply, unless they involved some linguistically neutral pointing.

So I do what most English people do in France – I speak English with a French accent. “*Ello, ‘ow arr yooo*” I enquire, my tone a hybrid of Maurice Chevalier and Peter Sellers. I usually tack a triumphant *Monsieur* on the end of every sentence, which is cool unless the person with whom I am conversing happens to be female. Thus my trip to Paris this last week was a series of embarrassing gaffs with more hand waving than a windmill. I did try to ask for a chair in a café – but it turns out that I actually asked to sit on a dog. Most Parisians I met smiled graciously when I apologized for my lack of French – and spoke fine English themselves.

One morning, I observed the antics of a herd of fellow English tourists – and felt ashamed. They were mimicking, in high-pitched parrot fashion, the Frenchman who was trying to sell them a Metro

ticket. Obviously graduates from the Alf Garnet School of International Diplomacy, they were totally aghast – appalled even – because this gentleman didn’t speak English like themselves, despite the screamingly obvious fact that they were guests in France – *his* country.

Quite simply, they were of the opinion that everyone should look and sound like they looked and sounded. Lurking beneath their crass behaviour was the deception that to be different is to be inferior. Kindly conform, or you are ever so slightly less valuable and significant than we are – for we, after all, are normal – or so the deception goes.

Religion often creates colourless uniformity. Those zealous bloodhounds, the religious leaders of the day, were always hot on the trail of Jesus; his main crime was that He was so *different*. They sniffed the scent of his uniqueness, and bayed like dogs. But, totally refusing to conform to *their* expectations, Jesus marched to a different drumbeat, one tapped out by his Father. At every turn they tried to make him smother him with sameness, and desperately sought to buckle him into their religious straightjackets. They failed. Winsome escapist that He was – and is – He not only resisted their cloning, but called His friends and followers to a life of studied non-conformity. He repeatedly spoke out about the bland pseudo – spirituality of the “teachers of the law” in the Sermon on the Mount. His call? “*Don’t be like them.*”

I am very guilty of religious control freakery, being more comfortable around folks who worship like I do, who share a common view of how church leadership should be structured, and who use the same general charismatic vocabulary as my own. Perhaps that’s normal – birds of a feather and all that – but when my desire for comfort causes me to be dismissive of others who don’t fit the mould of my making, then blind arrogance has set in.

Sometimes parenting is about an inappropriate corralling of our



“I DO WHAT MOST ENGLISH PEOPLE DO IN FRANCE – I SPEAK ENGLISH WITH A FRENCH ACCENT. “ELLO, ‘OW ARR YOOO.”

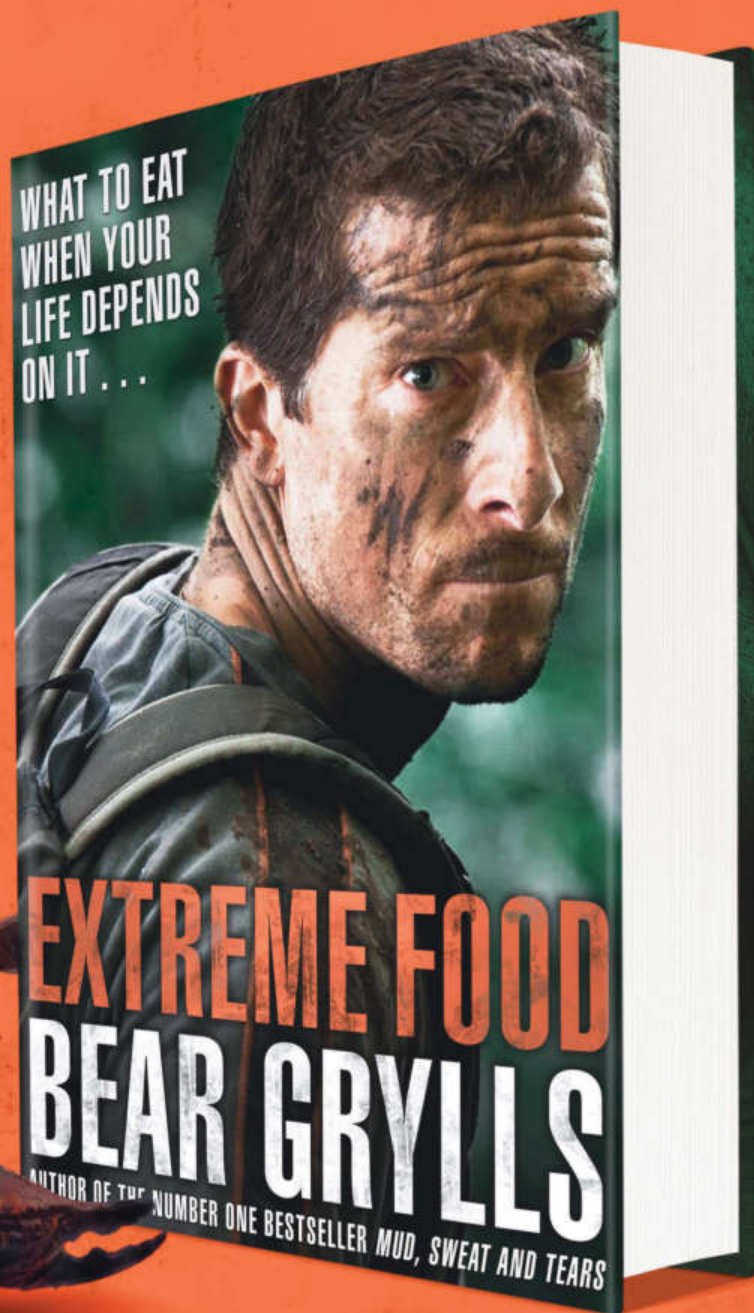
children in an attempt to turn out little facsimiles of us. Here I blush; sometimes I have mistaken a desire that my children become more like Jesus with a crusade to actually make them like *me*. No letters needed, thanks, for pointing out the Grand Canyon like gap between my maker and me.

Incredibly, you and I can be guilty of demanding conformity of God Himself. Church can be about a frantic attempt to make God fit our box. We frantically systemize Him; try to peg Him down like tiny people fussing over Gulliver. We who are made in *His* image desperately try to make Him in *ours*.

Let’s build churches that are truly colourful and diverse communities, where eccentricity is welcomed rather than feared, and where God’s one-offs don’t need to sacrifice their uniqueness in order to belong. Regimen is for the cult, not the church. ■

Jeff Lucas is an international speaker, broadcaster and author of 22 books. He loves to communicate using humour and storytelling. He is a monthly contributor to *Christianity* magazine and writes daily Bible reading notes, *Life Every Day*. Jeff holds a teaching position at Timberline Church in Colorado and is married to Kay.

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COMMENT

NATHAN BLACKABY

The Last Word

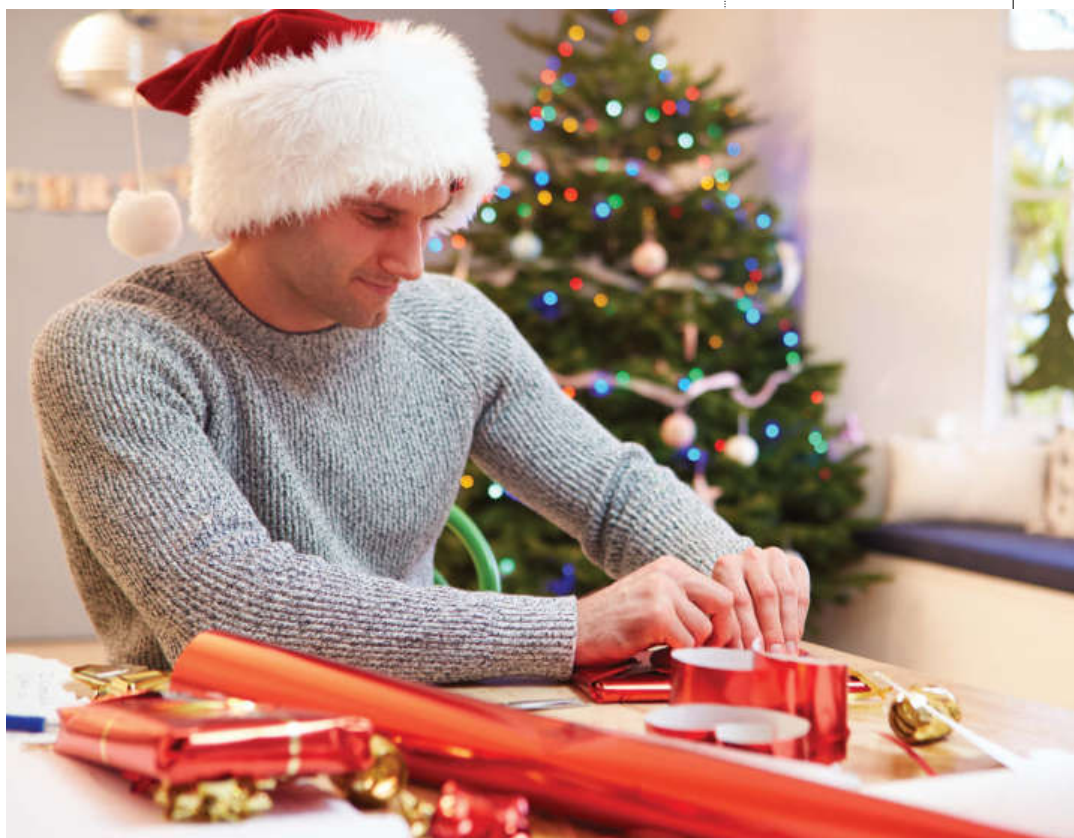
Christmas

So Christmas is approaching quickly. In our house it has always been something we really look forward to. My wife has a lot of traditions and routines that she inherited from her family in preparation for fun with the children, setting up the tree, decorations and wrapping presents. Let me give you an idea of what this is like, because we have very different approaches.

Wrapping paper must be different if it is presents for the children from their mum and dad, Father Christmas, or the fairy on the tree. So imagine the scene, wrapping up the night before Christmas – (I am tired and trying to navigate three different rolls of paper for three different children. It has been a bit stressful the last few years, as I can wrap every present given to me really quickly as a Christmas cracker. Paper, twist both ends, wrap Sellotape around both ends, done. Next...

One year I thought it would save time if I just whacked the tree up, threw on the decorations and popped the fairy on top. Let me tell you now, this was a terrible error. There was a process and method, which now, looking back, is a lot of fun and the children love it, but I saw a job that needed doing, so did it.

At Christmas as a child, my dad would always say to me, "Wanting is never the same as having, son." Those words stayed with me, and even now I find myself saying them



"I WOULD LIST THEM OUT AND WRITE LONG AND DETAILED RECORDS OF THE ITEMS I NEEDED TO PRIORITISE FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS."

to my children as they turbo-flick the TV and seem to find every Christmas toy being advertised as 'the one they must have'. "You want it, kids, but when you get it, it won't be the same," I tell them. But I was no different; I used to take the Argos catalogue to bed around about now, and I would mark and turn the pages over on all the things I 'needed'. I would list them out and write long and detailed records of the items I needed to prioritise for Christmas gifts. "Wanting is never the same as having, son."

So, what's it all about? Maybe you have been dragged around the shops Christmas shopping, or share in my wrapping misery. Maybe you find yourself constantly looking for

the next thing, the next purchase or possession that will make you feel good again. Maybe for you it is about family and getting together and having so much to eat that you manage to gain a stone in two days.

Here is an old saying that is a bit cheesy really, you could melt this one down and have cheese fondue, but it still makes a good point. Christmas without Christ is just 'mas'.

I don't see Christmas so much as the baby in the bed of straw, I see a rescue mission, an elaborate rescue plan to save everyone and set the record straight. That is an awesome gift that you won't find in the catalogue – oh, and by the way, it is free for you and me.

Happy Christmas, fellas. ■

Nathan is married to Jennie and they have two daughters and a son. Nathan leads Christian Vision for Men (CVM) and you can follow him on Twitter and on Facebook.

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